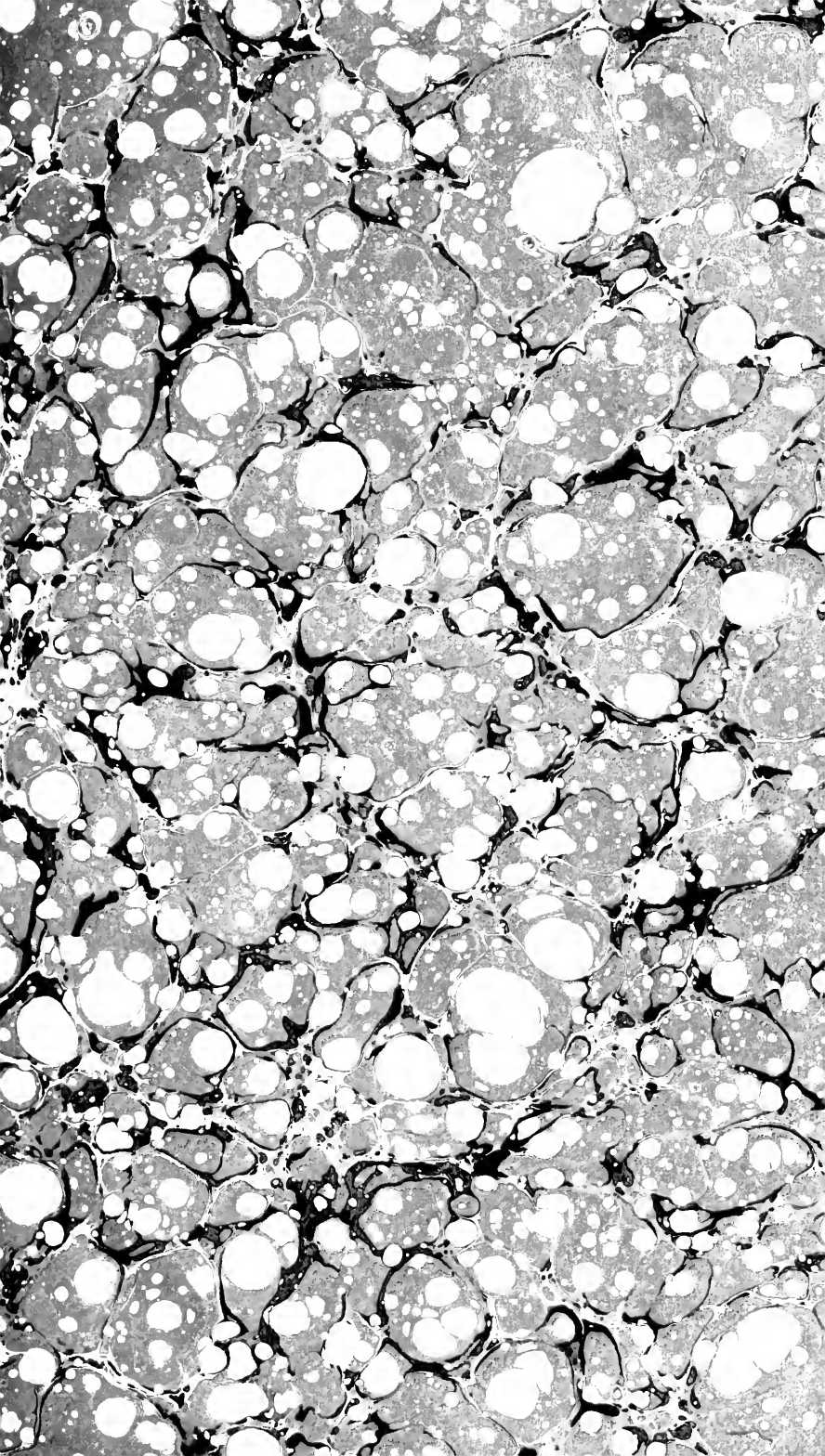


Library of the Theological Seminary,
PRINCETON, N. J.

BX 5995 .H6 A5 1832 v.3
Hobart, John Henry, 1775-
1830.

The posthumous works of the
late Right Reverend John



THE
POSTHUMOUS WORKS

OF THE

LATE RIGHT REVEREND

JOHN HENRY HOBART, D.D.

BISHOP OF THE PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH
IN THE STATE OF NEW-YORK.

WITH

A MEMOIR OF HIS LIFE,

BY THE

REV. WILLIAM BERRIAN, D. D.

RECTOR OF TRINITY CHURCH, NEW-YORK.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

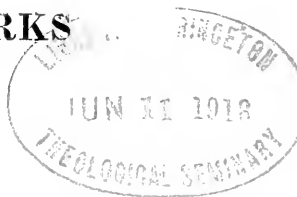
VOL. III.

NEW-YORK:

PUBLISHED BY SWORDS, STANFORD, AND CO.

No. 152 Broadway.

1832.



Entered according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1832, by MARY G. HOBART, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States for the Southern District of New-York.

EDWARD J. SWORDS, PRINTER
No 8 Thames-street.

CONTENTS OF VOLUME III.

SERMON I.

THE ILLUMINATING POWER OF THE GOSPEL.

2 CORINTHIANS iv. 4.

The light of the glorious Gospel - - - - - 1

SERMON II.

THE MANIFESTATION OF CHRIST TO THE SOUL OF THE BELIEVER.

2 CORINTHIANS iv. 6.

For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ - - - 13

SERMON III.

THE FOLLY OF TRUSTING TO THE FUTURE.

JAMES iv. 14.

Ye know not what shall be on the morrow - - - - - 24

SERMON IV.

THE INSTABILITY OF HUMAN REASONINGS IN CONTRAST WITH THE STABILITY OF THE WORD OF GOD.

1 CORINTHIANS vii. 31.

The fashion of this world passeth away - - - - - 33

SERMON V.

THE RACE NOT TO THE SWIFT.

ECCLESIASTES ix. 11.

I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all 43

SERMON VI.

THE CHARACTER OF SIMEON.

LUKE ii. 25.

And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him - - - - - 56

SERMON VII.

DUTIES INCULCATED BY THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

ISAIAH lxiv. 8.

But now, O Lord, thou art our Father; we are the clay, and
thou art the potter; and we are all the work of thy hand - 67

SERMON VIII.

THE APPEALS OF CHRIST TO THE SINNER.

REVELATION iii. 20.

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my
voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup
with him, and he with me - - - - - 79

SERMON IX.

PARABLE OF THE MARRIAGE FEAST.

MATTHEW xxii. 3.

And he sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden
to the wedding: and they would not come - - - - - 94

SERMON X.

THE RULE OF FINAL JUDGMENT.

ACTS x. 34, 35.

'Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive
that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation,
he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted
with him - - - - - 108

SERMON XI.

THE CALLED AND THE CHOSEN.

MATTHEW xxii. 14.

For many are called, but few are chosen - - - - - 123

SERMON XII.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FIDELITY IN WARNING SINNERS.

ISAIAH lviii. 1.

Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and
show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob
their sins - - - - - 137

SERMON XIII.

SELF-EXAMINATION.

LAMENTATIONS iii. 40.

Let us search and try our ways - - - - - 150

SERMON XIV.

THE DELAYS OF REPENTANCE.

ACTS xxiv. 25.

Go thy way for this time ; when I have a convenient season,
I will call for thee - - - - - 164

SERMON XV.

DEATH-BED REPENTANCE.

MATTHEW xxv. 10.

And the door was shut - - - - - 175

SERMON XVI.

THE PETITION OF THE PENITENT.

LUKE xviii. 13.

God be merciful to me a sinner - - - - - 188

SERMON XVII.

THE NATURE AND NECESSITY OF PRAYER.

MATTHEW vii. 7.

Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock,
and it shall be opened unto you - - - - - 200

SERMON XVIII.

THE NECESSITY OF DILIGENCE IN OUR CHRISTIAN CALLING.

2 PETER i. 10.

Give diligence to make your calling and election sure - - - 211

SERMON XIX.

THE GRACE OF GOD REQUIRING HUMAN CO-OPERATION.

PHILIPPIANS ii. 12, 13.

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For
it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of
his good pleasure - - - - - 223

SERMON XX.

SELF-COMMUNION.

PSALM lxxvii. 6.

I commune with mine own heart, and search out my spirit - 237

SERMON XXI.

CONSIDERATION OF TEMPORAL AND SPIRITUAL DUTIES.

ROMANS xii. 11.

Not slothful in business ; fervent in spirit ; serving the Lord 247

SERMON XXII.

CHRIST RIDING INTO JERUSALEM.

MATTHEW xxi. 10, 11.

And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? And the multitude said, This is Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee - - 259

SERMON XXIII.

ABRAHAM OFFERING UP ISAAC.

GENESIS xxii. 10.

And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son - - - - - 273

SERMON XXIV.

THE LAMB OF GOD.

ISAIAH liii. 7.

He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter - - - - 287

SERMON XXV.

THE CONTEST AND VICTORY OF EMMANUEL.

ISAIAH lxiii. 1—6.

Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the wine-fat? I have trodden the wine-press alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury, and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in my heart, and the year of my redeemed is come. And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me; and my fury, ^{it} upheld me. And I will tread down the people in mine anger, and make them drunk in my fury, and I will bring down their strength to the earth 298

SERMON XXVI.

THE GRAVE OF JESUS—THE SCENE OF THE RESURRECTION.

MATTHEW xxviii. 1.

In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary to see the sepulchre - - - - - 311

SERMON XXVII.**THE DISPLAY OF THE DIVINE GLORY IN OUR REDEMPTION.****ISAIAH xlv. 23.**

Sing, O ye heavens; for the Lord hath done it: shout, ye
lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye
mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the Lord
hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel - 321

SERMON XXVIII.**THE REASONS OF JOY IN CONTEMPLATING THE DAY OF
THE LORD.****PSALM cxviii. 24.**

This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice
and be glad in it - - - - - 334

SERMON XXIX.**THE EXCELLENCY OF FAITH.****JOHN xx. 29.**

Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me,
thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen,
and yet have believed - - - - - 346

SERMON XXX.**THE LIFE AND ACTS OF JESUS, DURING THE PERIOD
BETWEEN HIS RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION.****LUKE xxiv. 36.**

Jesus himself stood in the midst of them - - - - - 361

SERMON XXXI.**THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING PARTAKERS OF THE HOLY
GHOST.****HEBREWS vi. 4.**

Made partakers of the Holy Ghost - - - - - 374

SERMON XXXII.**THE DIFFERENT WAYS IN WHICH WE MAY QUENCH THE
SPIRIT OF GOD.****EPHESIANS iv. 30.**

Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God - - - - - 388

SERMON XXXIII.**THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT****ROMANS viii. 16, 17.**

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are
the children of God: and if children, then heirs: heirs of
God, and joint-heirs with Christ - - - - - 400

SERMON XXXIV.

THE CHRISTIAN'S VIEW DIRECTED TO UNSEEN THINGS.

2 CORINTHIANS iv. 18.

While we look not at the things which are seen - - - 413

SERMON XXXV.

THE NATURE AND IMPORTANCE OF SELF-DEVOTION TO
GOD.

ROMANS xii. 1.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God,
that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, accept-
able unto God, which is your reasonable service - - - 425

SERMON XXXVI.

THE PATH OF THE JUST.

PROVERBS iv. 18.

The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more
and more unto the perfect day - - - - - 438

SERMON XXXVII.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE TALENTS.

MATTHEW xxv. 14.

The kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far
country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto
them his goods - - - - - 449

SERMON XXXVIII.

THE TEN LEPERS.

LUKE xvii. 17, 18.

Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There
are not returned to give glory to God, save this stranger - 464

SERMON XXXIX.

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS.

LUKE xvi. 19, 20, 21.

There was a certain rich man, who was clothed in purple and
fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: and there
was a certain beggar named Lazarus, who was laid at his
gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs
which fell from the rich man's table: moreover, the dogs
came and licked his sores - - - - - 476

SERMON XL.

THE SOURCES OF HUMAN TROUBLE, AND ITS ANTIDOTE.

JOHN xiv. 1.

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe
also in me - - - - - 490

PAROCHIAL SERMONS.

SERMON I.

THE ILLUMINATING POWER OF THE GOSPEL.

2 Cor., iv. 4.

The light of the glorious Gospel.

“THE natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; neither indeed can he, because they are spiritually discerned,” is a declaration of holy writ, which finds its attestation in the innumerable prejudices and passions which cloud the researches of the understanding, and oppose the most formidable obstacles to the reception of divine truth. It is a declaration further and most conclusively established by the fact, that the human intellect, in its highest state of natural perfection, strengthened and sharpened by the discipline of intense and profound investigation, was unable to draw aside the vail that concealed the spiritual and eternal world. Reason, by her most vigorous efforts, could never settle on a certain basis the principles and rules of virtue; nor could she, by all her soothings, calm the solicitude with which man contemplated that futurity, into the dark abyss of which he was hastening. It is, therefore, an essential requisite in a system designed for the salvation of man, that it should reveal and establish

those truths necessary to his duty, and his happiness here and hereafter, which human reason could not discover.

The "light of the glorious Gospel" possesses this illuminating power.

It illuminates,—

By the splendour and fulness of its revelations,

By the simplicity and clearness of its precepts,

By the brightness of its example,

By the influences of its divine graces.

The Gospel illuminates,—

By the splendour and fulness of its revelations.

It sheds the brightest lustre on every subject connected with the spiritual welfare and happiness of man; it leaves nothing to conjecture, to uncertain deductions, to dubious hope; and brings down divine truth from her celestial abode, in that simple and resplendent form which is calculated to excite for her a cordial reception. That spiritual and divine knowledge which reason ardently but ineffectually sought, the Gospel has revealed to the humblest understanding. Before its glorious light appeared, various and contending deities divided among themselves the dominion of the universe, and received the acknowledgment and homage not only of the illiterate multitude, but of the learned and the mighty. But the Gospel places at the head of the creation, which he called into existence, and on the throne of supreme dominion, one eternal and infinite God. The sensual imagination of man clothed the deities to whom he rendered homage with corporeal natures, with the wants and imperfections, the licentious desires and criminal passions of the human heart. But the Gospel,

discarding these absurd and corrupting notions of Deity, reveals God as an infinite and eternal intelligence, whose attributes place him at an infinite distance from imperfection and sin, and constitute him the source of purity and goodness as well as of power. The corrupt nations celebrated the worship of their divinities in rites the most licentious, and sought to propitiate their displeasure by sacrifices the most inhuman. But the Gospel of Christ directs the worshippers of the Almighty Father to offer to him the acceptable homage of an enlightened and grateful heart, and to worship him who is a spirit, in spirit and in truth. Ineffectual were the efforts of the human intellect to ascertain the mode by which the holy and just Sovereign of the universe could become reconciled to man, the wilful transgressor of his laws; painful was the suspense, whether all the costly splendour of heathen worship, whether the hecatombs that dyed the altars with human blood, could propitiate the wrath of an indignant heaven. But the Gospel of Christ exhibits the divine perfections meeting in holy concord at the cross of Christ, holiness vindicated, justice satisfied, and mercy triumphing in the all-sufficient atonement which a divine victim there made. The feeble lights of reason could not unfold the destinies of futurity, nor quiet in the soul the dreadful apprehension, that the grave might extinguish the powers and sensible ties of that spirit which panted for immortality. But "the light of the glorious Gospel" dispels every doubt, and confirms every feeble hope. The dark recesses of the tomb are opened to the eye of Christian faith—eternal day dawns upon it—it is the path by which the soul passes to the region of immortal joys.

Blessed Sun of Righteousness, how glorious the lustre which thy sacred beams cast upon truths that it was impossible for man to contemplate without the deepest emotion and anxiety! Blessed light of the Gospel, sent in mercy from the eternal Father of lights; we behold in thy revelations, (divine truth shining forth resplendent and glorious,)—the infinite and eternal Jehovah, arrayed in attributes the most illustrious and attractive, commanding, from the throne of righteous dominion, our enlightened homage and obedience; we behold a divine Saviour making a full propitiation for man's guilt, restoring the offender to the favour of his God, and preparing for the heir of sin and death the bliss of an immortal existence.

But further—the Gospel illuminates by the simplicity and clearness of its precepts.

These convey the most convincing and affecting instruction through the whole circle of religious, moral, and social duty; confirming what was before doubtful; enlightening what was before obscure; carrying to higher perfection virtues which were before acknowledged; and revealing and establishing duties most essential and important, of which reason was before ignorant, or which, in arrogance and pride, she had rejected. The pure and heavenly rules of morality are delivered in language concise yet perspicuous, sublime yet level to the meanest capacity.

The ancient schools of philosophers entertained contradictory ideas as to the foundation of morality, and the ends and the rewards of duty; and while they were engaged in refined disquisitions concerning the truth and importance of their respective theories, the claims and the excellence of virtue

were wholly concealed from the corrupt multitude. But the Gospel, referring the obligation of virtue to the will of the infinite and all-wise Lawgiver, and constituting, as the end and the reward of duty, our own spiritual happiness, and the attainment of the everlasting favour of our Maker and Judge, has thus erected, on a basis stable as the eternal throne, the foundation of virtue; and in the discharge of duty, engaged, by motives powerful as the endless and infinite bliss of heaven, all the affections of the soul. While heathen philosophy exhibited, in the most glowing and attractive colours, passions which, while they flattered the pride and roused the ambition of corrupt nature, were destructive of the real perfection and peace of the soul, and carried desolation and misery through the world, she rejected with scorn from her imperious code, those meek and gentle dispositions which, making the individual happy, contributed most powerfully to the happiness of others. These benign and amiable virtues the Gospel enjoins as essential qualifications for future blessedness, while she rejects those haughty and sanguinary passions, which so often visit the earth with misery, and assimilate men to the fiends of darkness. In fine, the code of morality which the Gospel enjoins, sheds luminous and satisfactory light on every part of duty, exalts and establishes the obligation and the rewards of virtue, and exhibits her in the simple and engaging lustre of that heavenly wisdom from which she emanates.

In one comprehensive precept is summed up, by the divine Author of the Gospel, the whole of our duty to God—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with

all thy mind"—thus engaging in love to the first and best of Beings, all the powers of the understanding, all the energies of the will, and all the affections of the heart; directing the understanding to exercise on him who is the fountain of truth, her most exalted contemplations; exciting the will ever to choose, as the supreme good, the infinite source of perfection; and awakening all the affections to seek, in the fruition of the Author of all purity and bliss, full and unalloyed felicity.

The important circle of relative and social duties the Gospel also regulates by a single precept, equally comprehensive and impressive—"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Are we eagerly attentive to our own interest and advantage? alive to the claims of our own reputation and character? and resolute in vindicating ourselves from the attacks of calumny and malice? When prosperity pours into our lap her treasures, are we elated with joy? and when overwhelmed with calamity, do we cast around the look of supplication for the sympathizing heart to share our woes, for the benevolent hand to succour us? This is the measure of our duty to our fellow-men established by the Gospel. Their interest we are to consider as our own; their reputation and character we are to defend and vindicate with the same bold and honest zeal with which we would repel attacks on our own; with the same emotions are we to hail the prosperity which brightens their path, as if its beams cheered our own; and the adversity which assails them, should awaken in us kindred emotions of grief and solicitude. Sacred spirit of Christian morals! by teaching us to do unto others as we would they should do unto us, thou dost make our

own feelings, wants, and interests, the measures of the kindness and the good offices we are to render to our fellow-men. Sublime spirit of the Gospel of Christ! thou dost excite in the soul those tender and amiable dispositions, which, if their sway were universal, would render the society of men on earth an image of the hallowed and peaceful fellowship of the blest in heaven.

Review the precepts of the Gospel with respect to the important branch of duties which we owe to ourselves. The virtues of humility and of meekness, of temperance and of chastity, are explained and urged in terms the most clear and forcible, and are all summed up with the most impressive and affecting energy, in the one sublime and luminous precept: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Exalted precept! which, not satisfied with correcting the exterior, with adorning the outside of our character, dost explore with divine light the inmost recesses of the heart; and dost insist on that universal and sacred purity which will qualify us for the fruition and enjoyment of God. In the code of the Gospel only thy lustre shines. The gods of unenlightened reason were beings sensual and impure. Impure and sensual were their votaries; for the heathen laws of morals were destitute of that enlightening power, which, searching every faculty of the soul, expels the darkness of impurity, and establishes the reign of holiness and peace.

You thus perceive, that the Gospel of Christ illuminates by the splendour and fulness of its revelations, and the simplicity and clearness of its precepts. Its illuminating power is still further increased by the splendid *example* which it exhibits.

It is in *example* that principles display their force and power; it is example which so strongly illustrates duty, which softens its rigour, which removes from it the difficulties that intimidate, and which sheds on it a lustre that attracts, and animates, and excites to ardent persevering virtue. The rules of morals which heathen philosophers delivered, were clothed in all the charms of elegant diction, and enforced by all the graces of majestic and persuasive elocution; but their influence was yet partial and feeble, because, besides other defects and imperfections, they were destitute of the enlightening, fascinating, and impressive power of example. Principles which did not exert their commanding sway over those who professed them; rules of morals, which, while they were designed to impress the excellence and enforce the practice of virtue, still left the teachers who delivered them under the sway of their passions, and their vices were deemed fallacious and visionary; intended merely to gratify the vain curiosity of the aspiring understanding, and to amuse and interest the imaginations of men.

What exalted lustre then is shed on the sacred precepts of the Gospel! what decided superiority over every other system, does our holy religion possess in the perfect example of its divine Author! Not only did Jesus Christ unfold the most splendid view of the divine nature and attributes, and exhibit, in the most perspicuous and animating light, the extensive circle of religious, moral, and social duties—he forcibly illustrated his precepts, and impressed them on the hearts and affections of men, by that perfect and spotless example in which every virtue was displayed in its highest

purity, and every duty exhibited in its brightest lustre.

This example was indeed *perfect*, for it was the example of him in whom dwelt the fulness of the Godhead. Amidst the brilliant lustre with which human example glows, we have to lament some blemishes that alloy its brightness. But the example of Christ was animated by the attributes of his divine nature. Imperfection and impurity came not near his hallowed person. Clad with the garments of eternal righteousness, he was "holy, harmless, undefiled." On every virtue that he practised, he shed the light of divine glory; in every duty that he discharged, he exhibited the splendour of divine holiness.

And his example thus perfect was *universal*.

Even in the possession of the most brilliant talents, man, from the weakness and error to which his nature is subject, is not calculated to shine in all the various characters and situations of life. The circumstances that influence the exertions of the human powers are so varied, that in no one individual can be found the sublime talents and powers necessary to meet all the varying calls of duty, and to shine forth with perfect lustre in every change of situation. To exhibit with the highest splendour all the varied and opposite virtues of our nature, and to shine forth with the highest excellence in all the numerous and variously modified relations of duty, was alone the attribute of him who united to a human a divine nature.

And his example thus perfect, discharging every duty to the uttermost—thus universal, extending to every virtue—was also *familiar*, coming down to the level of ordinary scenes and ordinary duties.

Lastly. The light of the glorious Gospel is dispensed in the illuminating grace of the Holy Spirit.

The natural weakness of the powers of the human mind, and the opposition of its prejudices and passions to the exalted and holy truths of the Gospel, would seem to indicate the necessity of divine illumination, of a constant communion between the soul and that Being who is the only source of spiritual knowledge. That the mode of this communion is inscrutable, constitutes no objection to it; for no truth which relates to the divine mind and the divine operations can be brought within the comprehension of our finite faculties. The doctrine of divine illumination and grace seems indeed to be a sentiment of nature: it is the foundation of all those invocations for direction and aid which the wise and good, in every age, have addressed to the infinite though unknown fountain of truth, and goodness, and power. Grateful then should we be that the Gospel provides those illuminations of the Holy Spirit, by which we are enlightened to discern and to receive the great truths of salvation, and guided "in the ways of God's laws, and in the works of his commandments."

When then, my brethren, the light of the glorious Gospel thus illuminates by the splendour of its revelations, the clearness of its precepts, the brightness of the example which it furnishes, and the grace of the Holy Spirit which it dispenses, let it not be our condemnation that light has thus come into the world, and we have chosen darkness rather than light. How inestimable is that Gospel which thus affords full and infallible instruction on those

spiritual and immortal interests of man, in regard to which reason could afford only plausible conjectures! The powers of the human intellect among the philosophers of the Gentile world, produced works of imagination and genius that have never been surpassed: and yet, on the subject of religion, how erroneous and corrupt their systems, how contradictory their conclusions, how feeble and fluctuating their hopes! (and their views of immortality were interrupted by the gloom of the grave.) Extinguish the light of the glorious Gospel, and darkness covers the spiritual world—man's nature and destiny, his duties and his hopes. In vain will his guilty spirit seek reconciliation and peace, and explore the way of access to the offended Majesty of heaven. In vain will his virtuous powers pant after the full knowledge and enjoyment of the Author of his being, and, turning with disgust from the errors, and sins, and sorrows of this world, look for perfection and bliss in an immortal existence. He sinks into the grave, *hoping* indeed that it may not close for ever upon his spirit, but yet dreading lest the sceptre of oblivion may for ever rule his slumbers.

My brethren, the light of the glorious Gospel relieves us from these doubts and fears that would alloy all our virtuous joys. Let us often reflect with gratitude on the inestimable gift; on the exalted privilege of being called to the knowledge of God, of Jesus Christ whom he has sent, whom to know is life eternal. Let us not obstruct, by the pride or presumption of human reason, or by impenitence and sin, the illuminating efficacy of the light of the Gospel on our hearts. Humble, submissive, penitent, and obedient, let us seek, by

fervent prayer, that divine illumination and grace by which our faith will daily become more strong and triumphant, and our obedience daily more sincere and holy, until our faith shall terminate in the vision of the transcendent brightness of the divine glory, and our obedience in the rewards of perfect and eternal bliss.

SERMON II.

THE MANIFESTATION OF CHRIST TO THE SOUL OF THE BELIEVER.

2 COR. iv. 6.

For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

THE glorious renovation of man by the spirit and power of Jesus Christ, is compared by the apostle to the magnificent work of creation, when, at the almighty fiat of God, the beautiful and stupendous fabric of the universe arose from the dark and gloomy void. Not less profound and dreary the chaos into which sin had plunged the moral world. Not less splendid and efficacious that fiat which illuminated the nations that sat in darkness and the shadow of death, with the renovating beams of divine and celestial knowledge. The splendid event which, revealing the new-born Saviour to the wise men of the East, was a sign and pledge of his future manifestation to the whole world, both as a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel, the church commemorates at this season. The external illumination of the world by that glorious Sun of Righteousness which arose upon it, dispensing healing in his beams, would be a subject not less appropriate to the season than fruitful of sublime and useful instruction. But to little purpose will the illuminat-

ing beams of the Sun of Righteousness be shed around, unless our hearts experience their vivifying power. To our utter condemnation it will tend that light has come into the world, if we choose darkness rather than light. The mind of man, clouded by error and wrapped in sin, resembles that dreary chaos from which God elicited the world. And God, who at the first commanded the light to shine out of darkness, must shine into our *hearts*, or we shall be ignorant of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Christ Jesus. That Saviour, in whose person, character, and offices, the glory of God shines with the most resplendent lustre, must not only receive our external homage, our nominal acknowledgment and belief—our understandings must discern his excellence and glory, our hearts must experience his illuminating and renovating power, there must be a spiritual manifestation of him to the soul. Then, transformed out of darkness into his marvellous light, redeemed from the bondage of error and dominion of sin into the glorious liberty of the sons of God, we shall discern with clearness, and with the ineffable emotions of transport, the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus. To this spiritual manifestation of the Saviour to the soul let me then direct your attention, as a subject on which depends your right knowledge of the Saviour and your cordial reception of him, and of consequence your restoration to the image and favour of God, and your everlasting salvation.

And do thou, divine fountain of illuminating grace! let not thy ministering servant speak in vain. In vain indeed will be his most powerful efforts to manifest thy glory, divine Saviour, unless

accompanied by thy quickening spirit. Arise now, then, in the resistless majesty of thy strength; dispel the mists of error, burst the vail of sin which shrouds our hearts, and pour thyself upon them in the benignant effulgence of thy glory, an all-sufficient and almighty Redeemer.

The Saviour must be spiritually manifested to the soul.

I. I shall establish this truth.

II. I shall explain in what this manifestation consists.

1. There must be a spiritual manifestation of the Saviour to the soul.

To establish this truth, it might be necessary for me only to mention that a Saviour, who comes to restore us from error, to redeem us from sin, to effect our redemption, must necessarily exert his power on our souls. There we must discern him, there we must acknowledge him, there we must feel the power of his grace. Our souls are the seat of the vices that are to be subdued; in them are the sources that must be purified before the streams of virtue will flow; in them are the springs of those desires and affections which are to be satisfied with the fulness of divine consolation and love. They must, therefore, be the scene where the Saviour is to display his conquests, to erect the trophies of victory, to exert the sceptre of his grace. Before his enlightening beams the shades of error which envelop our minds must flee away, and the effulgence of divine truth be shed upon them; the upbraidings of conscience, the agonizing pangs of guilt, must be pacified by the merits

of his blood, diffusing peace and reconciliation; the swelling emotions of sensual desire, the angry tempests of guilty passion, must be quelled by the energy of his spirit, restoring the soul to rectitude and virtue. Our souls, in fine, are to be redeemed from error, from guilt, and sin, by the mercy and grace of Jesus Christ. Going forth conquering and to conquer, his office it is to "cast down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and to bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." In effecting these glorious purposes, he must be manifested to our souls both in the rich fulness of his mercy and the almighty energies of his grace.

If, from the consideration that the salvation of Christ is a spiritual salvation, and that his office is to enlighten, pardon, and redeem us, it necessarily results that there must be a spiritual manifestation of him to the soul, this truth will be rendered still more apparent, by considering the nature of those affections and duties which we are to discharge towards the Redeemer. The claims of this divine and glorious personage to our profound adoration, to our fervent love, to our lively gratitude, to our unbounded confidence, to our sincere and zealous obedience, will not be contested. How then can we exercise towards him these exalted affections till our understandings discern his excellence and glory, till our souls are forcibly impressed with the exalted and endearing relations which he sustains towards us? Will we bow before him in profound adoration, until we discern and acknowledge the divine glories of his nature, as the only-begotten of the Father, the King of kings and Lord of lords? Will the lively fervours of gratitude and

love be excited but by the manifestation to our souls of the divine and endearing virtues which shed around the Redeemer the mild lustre of celestial glory, and present him to us as the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely, the Lamb of God, who was wounded for our sins and bruised for our iniquities? Will we cast upon him the heavy load of our sins, and repose on him the burden of our sorrows, until we discern the all-sufficiency of his mercy, the fulness of his grace—until he is manifested to our souls as a Saviour possessed of resistless power, and animated with infinite desire to succour and restore us? Will we yield him the tribute of zealous and holy obedience, while we are insensible to the excellence and glory of his person, to the rich displays of his mercy and love towards us? Ah! superficial and feeble will be that homage, that love, that confidence, that obedience, which are not founded on a just appreciation of the excellence and glory of the Saviour, on a clear view of the important and endearing offices which he sustains towards us, on a lively impression of the riches of that mercy and grace which he freely and fully dispenses. Until we discern the excellence and worth of the object, in vain shall we seek to rouse affection; until the eyes of our understandings are enlightened to discern the Saviour, indistinct and uncertain will be our conceptions of him; until we *know him* in whom we are to believe, feeble and comfortless will be our faith; until God shines into our hearts to give us the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ, the vail of blindness will cover them. An unknown Saviour cannot exert his power, cannot dispense his blessings, cannot awaken affection,

inspire confidence and hope, or command obedience. Blessed Jesus! it is only when manifested to our souls in the riches of thy mercies, in the exhaustless treasures of thy grace, in the glorious effulgence of thy divine nature, that thou dost appear infinitely worthy our ardent love, our unbounded confidence, our eternal obedience and duty.

2. The Saviour then must be manifested to our souls. Under what characters must this manifestation take place? This is the second object of inquiry.

Christ manifests himself to the soul, as a Saviour atoning for sin by the merits of his blood, redeeming from sin by the efficacy of his grace, restoring the soul by his almighty power to the favour of God, to immortal blessedness and glory. As a Saviour pardoning sin, as a Saviour subduing sin, as a Saviour conferring everlasting redemption, does the true believer discern the Saviour, and exercise upon him the triumphs of holy faith.

When the Spirit of God, lighting up the accusations of conscience, presses upon the trembling soul of the sinner the conviction of his guilt; when, enlightened to discern the inflexible claims of God's justice, the unspotted rigour of divine holiness, he trembles under the sentence of condemnation which his sins have merited, which divine justice and holiness exact; when, turning his view on his own character and condition, he finds himself condemned at the bar of eternal justice, possessed of no plea to avert the vengeance that impends over him, no power to render that unspotted obedience which divine holiness exacts;

when the soul of the sinner is thus abased and humbled, Christ manifests himself as a Saviour expiating sins by the merit of his blood. I have trodden the wine-press of divine wrath; I have nailed to my cross the sentence of condemnation; my blood has flowed a ransom for the guilty; sprinkled on the mercy-seat, it propitiates divine justice. "Come unto me all ye who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."* Soothing and enlivening these heavenly accents of his compassionate Redeemer descend into the soul of the penitent sinner. He beholds the arms of mercy extended towards him—he beholds the bosom of the Saviour open to receive him to rest and peace—infinite mercy and infinite power shedding around the Son of God their glorious effulgence—every doubt is dispelled—hushed every apprehension—vigorous and triumphant confidence animates his spirit. Wretched and guilty, he flees to the Friend of the wretched, to the Saviour of sinners. His weary and heavy laden soul sinks to soothing rest in the bosom of his Lord. Sheltered there, the tempest of divine justice passes by unheard; the light of the reconciled countenance of his God alone shines upon him; his Saviour intercedes for him as the purchase of his blood; to his Saviour he clings as his Lord and his God, his tender and unfailing friend and protector. O my Saviour! feeble is language to display the power of thy manifestation to the soul of the penitent; feeble is language to convey the joy and transport which exhilarate the bosom where thy mercy dispenses its healing balm.

* Matthew xi. 28.

Nor confined is this manifestation of Christ to the single office of a Saviour expiating by his blood the guilt of sin. Ineffectual even would be the consolation conveyed to the soul of the penitent by the dispensation of forgiveness, if sin, left to uncontrolled dominion, were still permitted to blast his peace, to load his conscience with new transgressions, to arm with redoubled vengeance the shafts of divine justice. The awakened penitent is deeply impressed with the enormity, the baseness, and guilt of sin. Whether he regards it as destructive to the purity and peace of his soul, as awakening against him the wrath of heaven, or as tinged with the heavy guilt of ingratitude and rebellion against his Maker and God, his liveliest indignation is aroused against it, his most zealous and strenuous resolutions engaged in a contest with it. But alas! when he considers how pure, how strict, how undeviating the obedience which a holy and just God exacts, when he considers what exalted fervours of love and acts of duty are due to that God who has blotted out his iniquities, to that Saviour who bought him with his own most precious blood; and when he considers what errors and prejudices cloud his understanding, what sensual appetites and passions control and enslave his will, and corrupt and debase his virtuous affections, what a host of temptations assail him, either assuming an alluring garb, imperceptibly to obtain the victory over him, or by sudden and violent force overpowering his holy resolutions; when he thus considers his impotence and depravity, the law of his members warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity, he sinks under the conviction of his weakness and unworthiness; his agonized soul bursts

forth into the exclamation of despair—"Wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"* This is the moment for the Saviour to pour upon the soul the glorious manifestation of his power and grace. "I am he who giveth you the victory; the Spirit of the Lord is upon me; for he anointed me to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound."† "Strengthen then the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees; my grace shall be sufficient for you, my strength shall be made perfect in your weakness. I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."‡ With these invigorating assurances, does the Saviour manifest himself to the soul as its almighty Sanctifier. The fulness of the Godhead dwelling in him, he sheds on the mind divine light and knowledge, he invests the soul with the spotless robes of righteousness, he rules every rebellious passion by the sceptre of his grace. The penitent believer no longer bows down in despair under the enslaving chains of sin. At the almighty voice of the Son of God they fell from him, leaving him in the glorious liberty of the sons of God. With profound homage he adores the Saviour who is manifested to his soul in the fulness of grace and salvation. "My Lord and my God," expresses at once profound adoration; the fervours of confidence, the resolutions of grateful and submissive love. With triumphant and undeviating faith he clings to that Saviour who is made unto him wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. Glorious and triumphant,

* Rom. vii. 24.

† Isa. lxi. 1.

‡ Isa. xli. 10.

blessed Saviour, is thy manifestation to the soul, when thou dost redeem her from corrupt passions, and shed upon her holy and celestial graces!

Faith has now opened to the true believer those manifestations of the mercy and grace of Christ which afford him the joyful assurance of rescue from the guilt and from the dominion of sin. But, to complete his redemption, and to render perfect the character and office of the Saviour, another glorious work must be effected. The believer looks forward with awful apprehension to the contest in which he must engage with death, the inexorable enemy of man. Who shall assuage the agonies of the conflict? Who shall endue his trembling spirit with strength to sustain it? On whose kind rod shall he rest when, harassed and sinking, he passes through the dark valley of the shadow of death? Who will conduct him to the everlasting hills, to the celestial city of the living God? Who will resuscitate his body from the sleep of the grave, and rescuing it from the bands of corruption, invest it with immortal garments? Who will advance his soul to those seats of blessedness, to those immortal felicities, to that eternal fruition of the presence of God, which no strength of nature can attain, which infinitely exceed the merit of the most splendid virtue? Ah! these are suggestions which, when the believer regards only the weakness, the infirmity, and imperfection of his own nature, overwhelm with despondency and despair. But the splendid glory of the Saviour disperses this gloom. In majestic power he rises on the soul of the believer, as the almighty conqueror over death and the grave. "O death, I have been thy plague; O grave, I have been thy destruction. Fear not,

for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will redeem you from death, I will ransom you from the power of the grave.”* “In my Father’s house are many mansions; I have gone before to prepare a place for you, that where I am there ye may be also.”† Glorious manifestation of the Redeemer, which causes the soul of the believer to triumph, and arms him with strength to encounter and overcome the king of terrors. The Saviour is seated, Lord of all things, on the throne of glory; and where he is, there his faithful people shall be also.

* Hosea xiii. 14.

† John xiv. 2, 3.

SERMON III.

THE FOLLY OF TRUSTING TO THE FUTURE.

JAMES iv. 14.

Ye know not what shall be on the morrow.

FIGURE to yourselves a frail, dependent, and erring being, surrounded by a thousand contingences over which he has no control, assailed by casualties that arrest his hopes, thwart his best concerted plans, and often blast his most flourishing enjoyments; who, in his most prosperous state, with every pleasure to gratify his desires, with every mean which wealth and power can furnish to ward off the assaults of calamity, must yet obey the summons that calls him for ever from the scene of his beloved delights. Would you suppose that a being thus situated could be engrossed with the objects around him, that he could be heedless of the event that may every moment hurry him into an eternal state of existence? And yet, my brethren, you here behold a picture of the condition, and you may here recognise the criminal and unaccountable infatuation of man. Though he hold his enjoyments by a tenure so uncertain, that he “knows not what shall be on the morrow;” though disappointment continually mocks his most vigorous and well directed exertions; though he must soon fall, (yes, on the morrow, or to-day,) under the stroke of that foe who often gives his victims no

warning of his approach; though the experience of every day brings home to his heart the uncertainty of life and all its joys, we yet behold him eager and unwearied in the pursuit of them, devoting to them his supreme attention and exertion. He goes on his career self-confident, ambitious, daring, as if he were the master of his own destiny, and held in his hand those numerous casualties that arrest his career and darken his prospect; or as if he could repel the messenger death—"Go thy way, at a more convenient season I will heed thee."*

Widely different is the conduct to which a just estimate of the changeable and uncertain nature of all worldly objects would direct us—"we know not what will be on the morrow." Humility in prosperity, moderation in the pursuit and enjoyment of the things of the world, and above all, the abstraction of our thoughts from the present scene, so as habitually to prepare for the event, that, at an uncertain period may separate us from it, are the virtues which should arise from a just estimate of human life. Frequent reflection on its vanity and uncertainty would tend, more than any other consideration, to moderate all our feelings and views in regard to it, and to excite us earnestly and anxiously to seek the enduring realities of a future world.

"Ye know not what shall be on the morrow."

How vain, then, all the triumphs of prosperity!

How absurd a proud confidence in ourselves!

Above all, how unwise that attachment to the world which prevents us from preparing for the inevitable event of our departure from it!

* Acts xxiv. 25.

“Ye know not what shall be on the morrow.”

How vain, then, all the triumphs of prosperity!

To behold the elation and proud independence which prosperity often inspires in the mind of man, the confident ardour with which he cherishes new schemes of wealth and power, and the bold presumption with which he defies the assaults of adversity, you would suppose that he was defended with an ethereal armour, and that the fabric of his felicity was founded on a rock enduring and stable. But the consideration of the uncertain tenure by which he holds his present enjoyments, exhibits in glaring colours the folly and the impiety of this self-confident presumption, this proud and vain-glorious boasting. “Thou knowest not what shall be on the morrow.” The events of the morrow are beyond thy control. Hidden in the secret counsels of Providence, they mock thy most inquisitive scrutiny, elude thy most ingenious arts, and baffle thy most vigorous power. Some violent casualty, some change of affairs, which no foresight could discover, against which no prudence could provide, may, in the moment of fancied security, thwart thy best concerted plans, and demolish the towering structure of thy prosperity. Thy frail bark is tossed on an ocean which capricious tempests agitate; and he who one moment mounts on the swelling surge, is plunged the next into the abyss which threatens to overwhelm him. Every day’s experience proves that “the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong;”^{*} that the most prudent vigilance, the most strenuous exertions, will not always ensure success, nor the boldest arm of human power ward off the stroke of misfortune. How vain then thy

^{*} Eccles. ix. 11.

relation and thy presumptuous confidence in that prosperity which a thousand accidents may subvert! The unseen arm of an almighty power irresistibly directs all events, and controls all thy actions. He will mock the puny efforts of thy presumptuous strength; he can defeat the best arranged schemes of thy inordinate ambition; whenever the suggestions of his infinite wisdom and sovereign power dictate, he will turn from thee the current of prosperity, and the blessings and advantages of which thou dost now proudly boast, will be the portion of another.

Learn then, my brethren, from the uncertainty of all human enjoyments, to indulge with moderation in the blessings of prosperity. Let not those adventitious gifts elate you, of which the capricious events of the future may deprive you. Cultivate, even in the exhilaration of prosperity, that humble and dependent spirit, that deep sense of the uncertainty of all human enjoyments, which will lead you to employ aright the blessings which distinguish you, and prepare you to bear, at least with composure, the unforeseen stroke that may tear them from you. Consider all the advantages which you enjoy, as talents intrusted to you for wise purposes, by the Almighty Giver of all good; and, above all, remember he will call you to a strict and solemn account of the use you make of them while in your possession.

“ You know not what shall be on the morrow.”

How absurd, then, a proud confidence in ourselves!

If all the events which affect our prosperity were placed perfectly within our control, and if we could

always foresee the dangerous assaults to which our virtue would be exposed, we might then have some ground for confidence in the dictates of our own prudence and the efforts of our own strength. But since events which have the most important effect on our interest and our happiness often defy the keenest foresight and baffle the provisions of the most consummate sagacity, since our virtue is exposed to the sudden and violent assaults of the most alluring temptations, a proud confidence in our own wisdom and power is not more presumptuous than dangerous. Self-confidence lulls that vigilance and caution which, fortified and guided by divine grace, are the only effectual guards of our piety and virtue. "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."* How often does that self-confident strength which to-day boasts its efficacy and reposes in security, to-morrow fall a victim to an unexpected temptation dressed in some novel and alluring garb! The lesson which we should learn from the uncertainty of every thing human, is to distrust ourselves, to acknowledge our own weakness, and to seek that almighty strength which will give success to our efforts, which will enable us to sustain and to repel the most powerful assaults of our spiritual enemies. "Ye know not what shall be on the morrow." Temptations may assail you, which in a moment may hurl you from the heights of virtue into transgression, and shame, and remorse. Look forward, then, to thy future course, not with confident presumption, but with solicitude and apprehension. Reflect often on the number and power of the temptations which surround you, and on the weak-

* 1 Cor. x, 12.

ness of your own resolutions and your own efforts, and turn with deep distrust from yourselves to that almighty Being who is ready to succour you. Supplicate with earnest, with humble, with persevering fervour, that all-powerful grace which alone, by quickening and strengthening your own powers and exertions, can keep you from falling, can defend you through the vicissitudes of life, and through the seducing temptations to which, in this your state of probation, you are constantly exposed.

“Ye know not what shall be on the morrow.”

How unwise then that inordinate attachment to the world, which prevents us from preparing for the inevitable, but, as to the time of its occurrence, uncertain event which is to separate us from it.

If daily experience did not verify the lamentable fact, could we be persuaded to believe that man, who is doomed to sink under the stroke of death, who labours under fearful uncertainty in regard to the time when that stroke shall separate him for ever from the world, would yet remain in a state of indifference and insensibility as to those eternal interests that succeed the evanescent concerns of time; as profoundly occupied with sublunary objects, as if the tie that binds him to them were never to be sundered, or as if he could place this dread event at an immense distance? Though every day conducts to the tomb some of his fellow-mortals, arrested in that vigorous bloom of health which now freshens his countenance and enlivens his heart, in the full flush of that worldly desire and enjoyment in which he revels; though the unerring aim of death sometimes arrests, without warning, his careless victims, and instantly palsies

the stoutest frame, man shuts his heart to this voice of warning which speaks from the chambers of the dead—"Be ye also ready."* He celebrates his impure pleasures over the ashes of his friends and kindred that are scarcely cold. What infatuation! what criminal folly! Boatest thou that thou holdest life by a tenure that cannot be shaken; that, mocking the assaults of death, thou canst securely prosecute thy ambitious projects, and indulge thy sensual desires? Yes—whatever may be thy deliberate opinion, this is the language of thy conduct. To judge from the eagerness, the solicitude, the ardour, the supreme devotion with which thou dost pursue the objects of thy passions, we would suppose that here thou wast to terminate thy existence; that the world contained the only objects worthy of thy pursuit, and that could gratify thy desires. Ah! "thou knowest not what shall be on the morrow." Thy separation from the world is inevitable. An eternal destiny awaits thee. The awful period of thy entrance on it is hidden in the gloom of futurity. It cannot be far distant. It may be near at hand. Perhaps now the sentence is passed from the lips of thy almighty Judge—"Thy days are numbered"—and the angel of death is marking thee for his next victim. And wilt thou then indulge thy worldly passions, when the arms of death may be encircling thee? When eternity opens upon thee an irreversible destiny, shall the fleeting pleasures of time engross thy thoughts? When the tribunal of thy Judge is pronouncing thy eternal doom, wilt thou remain careless and secure? Alas! that the sinful indulgences, or even the lawful pursuits and enjoyments of to-day should entirely occupy us, when

* Matt. xxiv. 44.

we know not what may be on the morrow—when, on the morrow, the bright scenes of prosperity in which we now delight, may have vanished in darkness and in sorrow; when the health which to-day gives vigour to our exertions and zest to our enjoyments, may to-morrow be exchanged for the languor and the pains of sickness; when that life which to-day is ours, may to-morrow be extinguished in death; when to-day is the appointed time, the day of salvation, and to-morrow may behold us in that eternity where is to be the award of happiness or misery eternal.

Brethren, let the reflection daily occur to us, and be seriously pondered by us—“we know not what shall be on the morrow.” Let it be pondered by us, in order that we may make him our refuge under whose control is that morrow, and who can mark it to us either with the light of prosperity or with the darkness of wo; who can continue it to us as the gracious period of our probation, or, closing with it our mortal course, summon us to the unchanging scenes of an eternal existence. In the consideration of the uncertainty which hangs over the morrow, let not this day pass without the resolution, if that resolution has not been already made and executed, to make our peace with that almighty Being who thus regulates the destinies of time and eternity, and whom we have offended by our sins. Let his pardon be implored and obtained in deep penitence, in entire dependence on his mercy and grace through his eternal Son, who, as at this time, he sent into the world, to take upon him our nature, and to become obedient to the law, that he might free us from its penalties. Reconciled unto God through penitence and faith in the merits and

mediation of his Son Jesus Christ, renewed to holiness in the powers and affections of our souls, and evermore studying to do the will of our Father in heaven, we may confide in his protection and his favour. Whatever may be the changes of tomorrow, whatever may be the number of the days of our probation, whatever may be its vicissitudes, we shall enjoy the assurance of that high and holy One who sits on the throne of the universe, that they shall "all work together for our good,"* all contribute to our spiritual improvement here, and to the perfection of our natures and the consummation of our bliss hereafter. Then the blessings of prosperity will be heightened to us in the grateful recognition of the goodness and love of the almighty Benefactor who bestows them; the sufferings of this vale of tears will be eased in the humble but lively conviction, that even these our heavenly Father and God designs for our good, our eternal good. And then, even the close of life, the entrance on a future and eternal state of being, which to sinful and unsupported nature is so full of apprehension, if not of terror, will be viewed by us with resigned composure, if not with triumphant hope; for to us it will be the commencement of that day which will never be changed by the vicissitudes, nor clouded by the sorrows, of time, but which will shine forth in the splendour of divine glory, in the lustre of a felicity glowing more and more through the revolutions of eternal ages.

That such may be to each one of us, brethren, the termination of the present life, God of his infinite mercy grant, for Christ's sake; to whom, &c.

* Rom. viii. 28.

SERMON IV.

THE INSTABILITY OF HUMAN REASONINGS IN CONTRAST
WITH THE STABILITY OF THE WORD OF GOD.

1 Cor. vii. 31.

The fashion of this world passeth away.

AND yet, to witness the eagerness, the constancy, the irrepressible perseverance with which men pursue its gratifications and pleasures, the confidence which they place on its principles and maxims, one would suppose that it would endure for ever. Is not this infatuation as extraordinary as it is absurd, that the aspiring thoughts, the vigorous desires, the exalted affections of an immortal spirit, a spirit which sprung from the eternal source of goodness and bliss, is designed finally to centre its enjoyment in him, should be wrapt up in a world, "the fashion of which passeth away?" Ah! may it not be said that deep sleep hath fallen upon man, darkening his understanding and benumbing his noble powers, so that he values not the moral excellence of the divine perfections, the glories of that celestial kingdom for which he is destined, while he is pleased with the glittering toys of worldly pleasure, and eagerly seeks for happiness in the illusive phantoms of worldly wealth and honour? In vain does the unerring voice of inspiration declare the utter incompetency of all created enjoyments to fill the boundless desires of a soul

designed to be satisfied only with the glory and bliss of the eternal source of truth and felicity. In vain does the voice of inspiration confirm the representation of daily experience, that the world is a scene ever varying and shifting, where principles, and manners, and pleasures, different, and often opposite, dazzle, and interest for a while, and then pass away, the attention of their votaries being caught by the novelty or splendour of those that succeed. Untaught by observation, and deaf to the unerring dictates of that word which proclaims that the fashion of this world passeth away, men continue ensnared by its delusive principles, bent solely on obtaining its uncertain and fleeting pleasures.

Can it be necessary, when the solemn knell yet sounds that proclaimed the departure of the past year, with the varying principles and events, characters and manners, which marked its fleeting progress—when, enlivened by new hopes, and cheered by brighter prospects, we shut out both the inquietudes and pleasures of the past year, and welcome, in that which is to come, new and more extensive schemes of aggrandisement, a more uninterrupted and exalted flow of prosperity and happiness—in the very moment when we hail the commencement of another fleeting portion of time, can it be necessary for me to prove the truth, that “the fashion of this world passeth away?”

All, no doubt, will concede that the world is changing and uncertain in its principles and customs; that its enjoyments are fleeting and disappointing; that many of the events and labours that interest and agitate the present generation, will be forgotten in the new concerns and events of suc-

ceeding ages. So far all will allow that "the fashion of this world passeth away."

It is, however, my design to consider the assertion of the apostle as extended to subjects in which it is deemed that certain and immutable principles may be attained by the light of reason, and which an infidel and licentious spirit opposes to revelation, to that "word of God which" only "abideth for ever."

From the uncertainty stamped on the "fashion of this world," we are called to exempt the discoveries of reason in regard to the human mind, and which, it is said, without the aid of revelation, establish the obligations and duties of man.

But have the nature and powers of the human mind been analyzed with certainty? So far from this, reason, left to itself, has maintained that a thinking principle could not exist independently of body; and supposed the soul to be but a nice organization of the more refined particles of matter. It is revelation which redeems the noblest part of man from that destruction to which matter, frail and perishing, is subjected, and restores the soul to its true dignity, as an emanation from the ever-blessed God, spiritual and eternal, as its adorable Author.

Are the discoveries of reason in regard to the human mind fixed and certain? So far from this, you find philosophers maintaining opposite and contradictory opinions on the important and fundamental question of the freedom of the will in its operations. It is revelation only which rescues man from those false theories which would make him a mere machine, irresistibly set in motion, necessarily determined in its choice by external impulses. It is

revelation which, establishing the accountableness of man to God his Maker, the rewarder of the good and punisher of the wicked, establishes on this eternal basis his free agency.

Nor hath human reason succeeded in establishing the point, of all others most important, the foundation of the obligations of man to virtue and duty.

Various and changing theories make the obligation of virtue to arise from the nature and fitness of things, from its intrinsic worth and beauty, or from its tendency to promote public and private happiness. It is revelation only which, proclaiming God as the supreme Lawgiver, the eternal source of rectitude, the almighty Judge, infinite in power to reward and to punish—it is revelation only which thus establishes the obligation to virtue on the eternal and immutable foundation of the will of God.

Discard then, my brethren, the claims so often asserted of human reason to certainty on these momentous subjects. Many have there been who, trusting to her illusive lights, have been led through the perplexing mazes of subtle and refined argument, till, wearied with the fruitless search after truth, they fled in despair to the deadly gloom of scepticism. In every subject which relates to your nature as intelligent and accountable creatures, take for the guide and standard of your belief the unerring declarations of the word of God. Theories founded on the deductions of unassisted reason, like “the fashion of this world,” pass away, but the word of God, luminous and certain as its divine Author, abideth for ever.

The claims of reason, in regard to what is called

natural religion, are also like the "fashion of the world which passeth away."

Reason, say the enemies of revelation, is competent to discover all the truths which it is necessary for man to know concerning a supreme Being and a future state. But is reason able to ascertain the nature and essence of matter with which we are daily conversant, and which is the object of our senses? And can her unassisted powers discover the transcendent truth of the being of a God, infinitely removed from matter, uncreated, spiritual, and eternal? Where is to be found this system of natural religion so much extolled, which would usurp the place and authority of the revealed will of God? Shall we search for it among the wisest and best of the sages of antiquity? With them, as reason was advanced to her highest polish and strength, we ought to expect, if any where, to see delineated and established this boasted system. Alas! these enlightened sages arrived at no more certainty concerning God and his perfections, than the ignorant savage that prowls the wilderness. The father of the ancient philosophy, (Aristotle) in whom the native powers of the mind attained a degree of strength and perfection that has scarcely been rivalled, so far from ascertaining the divine nature and perfections, ascribed to gross and perishing matter the properties of divinity, and maintained that the world was eternal. And this opinion, which destroys the omnipotence, and renders unnecessary even the existence of a God, was held by almost all the ancient sects. The distinguished Roman orator (Cicero) embraced the same gross and absurd opinion of the eternity of matter, maintaining that a pure mind, thinking, intelligent, and

disconnected with matter, was altogether inconceivable. Those doctrines, without which religion is a mere illusion, the immortality of a soul and a future existence, were doubted by the wisest of the ancient philosophers. He who was the pride of Rome for his genius and eloquence, (Cicero) remained in doubt, even after having perused a celebrated treatise (of Plato) on the immortality of the soul. "While I read him," says he, "I am convinced; when I lay the book aside, and begin to consider by myself of the soul's immortality, all the conviction instantly ceases." The doubt on this interesting subject, that casts a gloom over the last moments of another virtuous heathen, (Socrates) has often been mentioned. In the awful moment when he stood on the brink of eternity, what was the light and support which natural religion afforded him? We hear from him no acknowledgment of the true God and his perfections, no adoration of his power and holiness, no trust in his goodness and mercy. The performance of a vow to a heathen deity was the subject which occupied his last thoughts. Instead of commending his soul into the hands of Him who made it, as he would have done, had he known the true God, the Author of his being, he breathes his last accents in the earnest injunction to his followers, to see that his frivolous and idolatrous vow was performed—"We owe a cock to Esculapius, forget not to pay the vow.") Oh! feeble the light of unassisted reason, which rescued not her wisest and best votaries from the most absurd and extravagant idolatry. The system of religion formed by thy efforts only, is "the fashion of this world that passeth away."

My brethren, when we find the most enlightened

of the heathen philosophers enveloped in ignorance, uncertain as to the truths of religion, need we wonder that the great mass of the Gentile world were not led, from the contemplation of the works of God, to know and adore their almighty Author? Need we be surprised at beholding the Gentile nations prostrate in adoration before the orbs that shine in the firmament, faint images of the Creator's glory? or trembling with superstitious homage before the vilest reptile that crawls on the earth? Let us no longer hear then of the ability of unassisted reason to discover and ascertain the necessary truths of religion. They were made known at the first by God himself, and spread through all nations by tradition. Reason is competent to illustrate and confirm them; and yet, alas! she disgraced and obscured them by the grossest superstitions. The world was never destitute of a revelation of God's will; natural religion, therefore, a religion discovered and established by human reason solely, never has existed. Some of the truths of revelation—as, for example, the being, and perfections, and providence, of the one supreme God, and the immortality of the soul—reason can go further in explaining and confirming, than she can those doctrines connected with the Trinity of persons in the Godhead, and man's redemption by the blood of the Son of God. But the former were made known by original revelation—reason did not discover them. It is impossible to prove that, left to herself, she ever could have discovered them, had they not been made known.

Cause then have we to bless God, that, on subjects so essential to our perfection and happiness as the knowledge of his nature and will, and our

eternal destiny ; we have an authority on which to rest, more certain and stable than the discoveries of reason, which, like “ the fashion of this world, passeth away.” God communicated his adorable name and will to our first parents. This knowledge, obscured by the fall, he in part renewed to the patriarchs, and more fully declared in his law and covenant with the Jewish nation. But, in his unsearchable counsels, he reserved its glorious and perfect consummation for the last revelation of his will by Jesus Christ. In the blessed Gospel of his Son is contained a discovery of the divine perfections and will, of the way of salvation, and of our eternal existence, to which reason never could have attained, but which is perfectly agreeable to her clearest and most enlightened dictates. This Gospel rests on the luminous and conclusive evidence of miracles and prophecy. The sufferings and death of those who first proclaimed it, attested its supernatural facts, involving the truth of its holy, and salutary, and exalting doctrines. Its rapid spread through the world, though opposed by the bigotry of the Jews and the learning and power of the Gentile world, proved that the arm which sustained it is divine. So valuable then to us, as it respects the order, the peace, the purity of the present life ; so indispensable, as it respects the destinies of the life to come ; let us hold fast to this blessed Gospel, resisting the assaults of the vain wisdom of this world, which would wrest us from this sure anchor of all our hopes, and cast us on the troubled ocean of doubt, and gloom, and despair.

There yet lives in the recollection of the present generation, the awful example of the impiety and crimes into which men will plunge, when forsaking

the unerring light of revelation, they take for their guide the illusive dictates of reason, and the corrupt impulses of their passions. A fearful war was waged, of atheism, irreligion, and licentiousness, against religion, virtue, and social order. The din of the conflict still sounds in our ears—the traces of its ravages are not yet obliterated in the nation which it desolated. The spirit of enmity to religion and to social order that kindled this conflict and so long fed its flames, exerts among us the deadly purpose of exterminating our holy religion, that licentiousness may have no control on its corrupt and desolating reign. Let us cling with renewed steadfastness to that pure, enlightening, and consoling system of religion revealed in the word of God, which will secure us from the corrupting principles of that world, “the fashion of which passeth away,” and conduct us to everlasting perfection and bliss in the future existence which it reveals.

Unchanging and substantial happiness is not to be found but in the love and favour of the ever-living God, the means of obtaining which are revealed in the Gospel of his Son. May his grace excite you from the heart to embrace, and strengthen you to hold fast his divine truths and promises. May his blessing, that maketh truly rich, that conveys unfailing and sure light and peace, follow you in all your enjoyments and pursuits. May his merciful providence preserve you, to come before him in this holy temple, on many returns of this day, more fervent and vigorous in your love and trust in him, more sincere and devoted in his service.

May he, the almighty and eternal God, be your

refuge and your portion, that when the vain wisdom of this world passeth away, your peace, stayed on him, the rock of ages, may endure for ever. May he be your Deliverer and Saviour, that, beyond this transitory and perishing world, you may find an inheritance eternal, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.

SERMON V.

THE RACE NOT TO THE SWIFT:

ECCLES. ix. 11.

I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.

THE universe is governed by that almighty Being whose power called it into existence. That it owes its origin to some cause, and that this cause must be intelligent, infinitely powerful, and infinitely perfect, is a strong dictate of reason. “The fool only saith in his heart, there is no God.”*

But if the world be created by an infinitely powerful and perfect Being, it must be preserved and governed by him. The same intelligence and power which produced it, will be necessary to sustain it. The infinite perfection of the Creator cannot permit him to be a passive spectator of the work of his hands, nor his infinite goodness to leave his intelligent creation unprotected. “The Lord he is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath.”† “He is the Governor among the nations.”‡

Under the control of the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, the physical and moral world is

* Psalm xiv. 1.

† Deut. iv. 39.

‡ Psalm xxii. 28.

regulated by those general laws which he hath established. From the use of certain means, a certain result generally follows; but God, by his providence, sometimes interposes, and orders matters totally contrary to human calculation, and to the ordinary course of human affairs. The second causes, by which the great first cause governs the world, usually operate with certainty and uniformity; but sometimes the general effect does not follow; means the most likely to produce an end are sometimes ineffectually employed, and the end is sometimes produced by the most unlikely means. Things do not always issue according to the general laws by which God governs the world. This is the truth declared by the wise man in the text—“ I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.”

Solomon had been surveying the whole compass of nature, “ from the cedar of Lebanon, to the hyssop that springeth out of the wall.”* “ He gave his heart also to seek and to search out by wisdom concerning *all things* that are done under heaven.”† Thus turning his thoughts from one subject to another, he contemplates and reproves, in the verse preceding the text, those slothful and desponding persons who, on account of the uncertainty of human affairs, discontinued the use of those means by which, ordinarily, success is obtained. Them he exhorts to diligence, to do with all their might whatsoever their hand findeth to do. In the words

* 1 Kings iv. 33.

† Eccles. i. 13.

of the text he then goes on, "I returned"—he turned his view to a contrary extreme in the conduct of men, perhaps more common—a presumptuous confidence in their own wisdom and exertions, as if by these, independently of the aid and blessing of God, success were to be obtained. This presumptuous conduct he reproves, by declaring that he saw under the sun, in the course of human affairs, events do not always take place according to the ordinary operation of second causes. "The race is not to the swift"—he who is the swiftest we should expect would always, according to the general laws of nature, win the race, and yet some untoward event may give the prize to an inferior rival. "Nor the battle to the strong"—victory we should suppose would attend the banners of the army the most formidable in numbers and in strength, and yet the most potent army, through some unlucky mischance, has been compelled to leave the field to a contemned adversary. "Nor yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding"—wisdom and understanding, in planning and executing schemes of aggrandizement, are the established means of success, and yet we see in the world that the most ingenious and acute in vain strive to attain the wealth which sometimes is poured into the lap of those who have neither the wisdom judiciously to form plans of obtaining it, nor the understanding prudently to execute them. "Nor yet favour to men of skill"—honour, in general, rewards the men of skill, and yet we see that some lucky accident sometimes advances suddenly to distinction those who have not the faintest claims to it, and do not possess talents that merit distinction. "Time and chance hap-

peneth to them all"—that is, unexpected events, contrary to the usual course of things, frustrate the exertions of the swift, the strong, the wise, the men of understanding, the men of skill, and give their glory to others. "The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all."

Things do not always issue according to the general laws by which God governs the world. Unexpected events frustrate the regular and usual means of obtaining success. This is the truth contained in the text, and it is a truth, the consideration of which is peculiarly suited to the present circumstances in which we are placed. Let us illustrate it by a brief survey of human life, and then let us deduce from it doctrinal and practical reflections.

Behold this truth verified in the public events of the world, and in the private life of individuals.

Behold it verified in the public events of the world.

Governments have vanished, which, reared and supported by power and wealth, promised, according to all human calculation, to defy the ravages of time and the blasts of adverse fortune. The tide on which they had been borne to grandeur and renown suddenly turned, and they floated rapidly back into the gulf of oblivion. Mighty kingdoms have disappeared; neither the talents of the statesman, nor the efforts of the patriot, could save them; and to the places of grandeur and opulence from which they had fallen, nations have been advanced, whom they once proudly ranked among the meanest of their vassals. Legislators have framed consti-

tutions, calculated, as they hoped, to perpetuate to the latest generations the freedom and prosperity, which were thus consecrated by all the efforts of genius, of talents, and of knowledge. And yet the fairest fabrics of human polity have not lasted even till the mouldering hand of time had gradually loosened their foundations. Suddenly demolished by the violence of popular phrenzy, or the attacks of despotic power, they have crushed beneath their ruins that freedom which human wisdom had destined to be perpetual. Who does not see in these events, so contrary to the ordinary operation of human causes, and therefore so contrary to human calculation, the declaration verified—that “the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all?”

In those conflicts where the fate of nations is decided by the sword, we see the same truth exemplified. Armies, formidable for their numbers, and more formidable for their discipline, have sometimes been discomfited by inferior forces, and lost the fame of past victories in present disgrace and defeat. The declarations of the word of God have been verified—“an hundred has chased a thousand, and a thousand has put ten thousand to flight.”* “There is no king saved by the multitude of an host; neither is a mighty man delivered by much strength.”† “The horse is prepared against the day of battle; but safety is of the Lord.”‡ “The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; but time and chance happeneth to them all.”

Behold this truth also exemplified in the issue of

* Lev. xxvi. 8.

† Psalm xxxiii. 16.

‡ Prov. xxi. 31.

those measures which are not only wisely planned, but which have in view some public meritorious object. These, in the ordinary course of God's righteous providence, we should expect would be successful, but even these are not exempt from those unforeseen and unexpected issues which frustrate the wisest plans and the most meritorious designs. Your cause may be that of truth, of justice, and of honour; the means by which you seek to advance it may be formed by wisdom and sanctioned by virtue; you may employ these means with courage, with resolution, with zeal, and with perseverance; and yet all these, though they deserve, may not procure success; knavery, impudence, cunning, and perhaps even folly, may debar you from victory. For in the mysterious course of God's providence, "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all."

But, my brethren, there are examples of the uncertain issue of all human plans and means, which fall more directly within the observation of each one of us, and come more immediately home to our own bosoms.

Look at those objects which are generally considered the sources of human happiness, and see whether the regular means of obtaining them are always successful.

The usual means of obtaining wealth, are industry and frugality, enterprise, prudence, zeal, and perseverance, and, as a general rule, they are successful; but still bread is not always to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding. One

man, from an early period of his life, has turned all his thoughts and studies to the acquisition of wealth; custom has fixed him in those habits favourable to its acquisition; he rises up early and sits up late, and eats the bread of carefulness; his enterprises are judiciously formed; they are pursued with industry, with zeal, and with perseverance; nor does prodigality curtail his means, or dissipate the fruit of his labours; and yet sometimes we see men of this description fail in the object of their pursuit; while some more fortunate individual, with less judgment and less exertion, finds her pouring her treasures upon him from every quarter. So frequent are such instances, that they have established the common remark, that some men succeed in all their enterprises, while others succeed in none.

Look at fame and reputation—by talents, learning, and merit, fame and reputation are usually acquired. Often, however, we see them attend boastful pretensions, obtrusive confidence, ostentatious display. The bold, the meddling, the forward, often, without real talents, push themselves into consequence; while real merit, too retiring to be ostentatious, and too modest to be bold and presuming, either languishes in obscurity, or only imperfectly obtains the estimation and fame which is its due. So true is it, that “favour is not always to men of skill.”

Turn to those scenes where the liveliest feelings of the heart are awakened, and whence arise their purest joys—the scenes of domestic life. You behold these scenes sometimes furnished with every essential constituent of happiness; you behold religion consecrating, by her celestial presence, the

circle of domestic enjoyment; and yet events, which wisdom could not foresee, nor prudence avert, nor piety ward off, suddenly cloud this blissful scene. Misfortune, sickness, or death, ravages it, and leaves no traces of felicity behind. Alas! "I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all."

Events, not according to the ordinary operation of the established laws of nature, and therefore styled accidents, and ascribed, in common language, to time and chance, frustrate the best concerted plans, disappoint the strength and wisdom of man, and impress on him his weakness and his ignorance, his dependence on a power over which he has no control.

This is the first lesson of instruction which we deduce from the doctrine contained in the text.

The varying and uncertain issue of human affairs should lead us to acknowledge and adore the providence of God.

He who doth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; whose hand none can stay, and unto whom none can say, What doest thou?—He who has laid and sustains the foundations of the earth, and is Governor among the nations—He who, sitting in the heavens, extends his power over the universe, regards and regulates also the most minute events; for he "commandeth the ravens,"* he "feedeth the fowls of the air," "without him not even a

* 1 Kings xvii. 4.

sparrow falleth to the ground," and he "numbers even the hairs of our head."* The world, bearing such evident marks of order and design, and man the noblest work that adorns it, must have proceeded from some intelligent cause. And the infinitely perfect Being who made the world, can alone preserve it; he alone can give effect to causes, and certainty and uniformity to the laws of nature. Chance is but an empty name, it has no being, it has no power; and therefore to ascribe to chance the universe and the events which happen in it, is as absurd as it is impious. To ascribe to chance the regulation of the state and destiny of man, is as gloomy and cheerless as it is false. Chance is only the term by which, in the common language of men, those events are designated which happen differently from the general operation of the laws by which God governs the world. But these unexpected and singular events, so far from being derogatory to his providence, are a powerful confirmation of it. Did human affairs proceed in an unvarying course, the uniformity of the operations of the laws of nature might lead us to forget the arm that controls and guides them: but when these laws are interrupted, and when events happen differently from the usual course of affairs, and therefore contrary to human calculation, our attention is arrested, we behold a striking display of almighty power changing or controlling the course of events; fear should fall upon us; reverence of this almighty power, thus baffling human strength, should fill our souls; they should be lifted up in adoration of the Most High God, in whose hand

† Matt. x. 29, 30.

are power and might; we should acknowledge that it is his inscrutable providence which takes the "race from the swift, and the battle from the strong," and which allots "time and chance to all."

And hence, also, we learn a lesson of dependence.

If the events of things were not *usually* according to known and established laws, if the use of means did not generally eventuate in the attainment of the end, enterprise would be discouraged, industry would relax her efforts, and the business of the world would be at a stand. But, on the contrary, lest men, perceiving the uniform success of their plans and efforts, should forget him, of whom are all man's goings; lest, perceiving the end, always following the means employed by them, they should grow insolent and haughty, and say it was their "own power and the might of their own hand that got them this wealth,"* and "forget the Lord their Maker," it pleases God sometimes to change the ordinary operations of causes.

"Let not then the wise man glory in his wisdom; let not the rich man glory in his riches; neither let the mighty man glory in his might."† Riches, wisdom, and might are often defeated and made to vanish before the breath of the Most High. All that we call natural causes are the instruments of his pleasure, and he applies them all to the purposes of his will. What a powerful motive then have we to serve him, who can raise up or bring low, who can save or who can destroy, who can prosper or defeat all our plans! What a powerful motive then have we to fear him, who can make natural

* Deut. 8. 17.

† Jer. ix. 23.

causes the instruments of his displeasure! He holds in his hand the fire and the famine, the sword and the pestilence, the storm and the earthquake. And he can make “the heavens over our heads brass, and the earth under our feet iron,”* and the very beasts of the field to rise up against us. Him, therefore, let us fear; let us ascribe to him whatever gifts of fortune, of talent, or of honour, distinguish us, and be humble; using these gifts as his stewards, and so employing them, that we may render our account to him with joy. Let us look to him to bless and prosper all our plans and all our efforts. When they are successful, let us give to him the glory, and praise him; when they fail, let us adore him who chastens and afflicts us for our good, and turn from our sins by repentance. Yes, my brethren, repentance is the lesson which his judgments, which are now abroad in the earth, which have visited our land, should teach us.† Repentance, bringing forth the fruits of righteousness, is the lesson impressed on us by the services of this day.

It is a truth, certain as the holiness and justice of God, that though, in the present world, there is one lot to the righteous and to the wicked—“time and chance happen to all”—yet a day is coming, when God will judge the world in righteousness; when he will make an eternal separation between the righteous and the wicked, between him who serveth God and him who serveth him not; when to the former he will award glory, and honour, and immortality, and punish the latter with everlasting destruction from his presence.

* Deut. xxviii. 23.

† Preached during the war of 1812.

Finally. From the doctrine contained in the text, that unexpected accidents frustrate the regular and usual means of obtaining success, we deduce the uncertainty of all human enjoyments; and hence we learn the wisdom of pursuing those spiritual joys which are beyond the reach of accident and misfortune. All worldly means may fail us; we cannot, therefore, be sure of obtaining worldly joys. Even when attained, all human efforts to preserve them may prove ineffectual. Are then all the pursuits of man liable to uncertainty? and are all his joys thus insecure? No—those pursuits which promote the perfection of our being, those joys which arise from the favour of our God, are not exposed to “time and chance.” In regard to these, it is a law pronounced by God, and unchanging in its operation—“Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened.”* To the guilty sons of men it was pronounced by their Saviour himself, as an unchangeable promise—“Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.”†

Here then, man, tossed on the uncertain waves of this troublesome world, thou shalt find rest. The mercy of thy Saviour, the favour of God, the glories of heaven, these afford joys that last for ever; the means of attaining these are certain and effectual. Seek ye then the Lord *now*, for he can *now* be found; call ye upon him *now*, for he is *now* near; to-morrow he may swear in his wrath that ye shall not enter into his rest. Turn then from your sins by repentance, live in the fear and service of him who rules in heaven and in earth; and then you

* Matt. vii. 7.

† John vi. 37.

need not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be cast into the midst of the sea; for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth, and he hath promised to be the strength of his people, and their portion for ever.

Yes, Christians! the means of attaining the prize of glory, through the mercy of God, are in your hands; faithfully use them, and success is certain. Here the race is to the swift, and the battle to the strong. In proportion to your efforts in the Christian life, will be your progress here, and your felicity hereafter. Wait then upon God your Saviour, and ye shall renew your strength. Wait upon him especially in that ordinance where he offers his body and his blood to be the spiritual nourishment and strength of his people. Ah! what prospect of attaining the prize of glory can they have, who refuse that divine strength which alone can ensure them victory? O Christians! your Saviour at his holy table now offers you spiritual strength, pardon, peace, immortality.* Go, penitent, believing and obedient, and you shall receive a title to a felicity, which, exalted infinitely above the attacks of that time and chance to which all sublunary joys are exposed, will flourish for ever in the presence of him who is the hope of his people, the Saviour of all them that believe.

* Preached on occasion of administering the holy communion.

SERMON VI.

THE CHARACTER OF SIMEON.

LUKE ii. 25.

And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him.

THIS was that venerable saint of Israel, who, blessed with the view of the new-born Messiah, considering the summit of his earthly hopes as attained, poured forth the ardent prayer—"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."* And from the character given of him in my text, we may pronounce that he was not unworthy of the distinguished honour of being one of the first to welcome the glorious Saviour of the world.

It is one of the admirable excellencies of the sacred writings, that they enforce the lessons of piety and virtue, not only by the most luminous and impressive precepts, but by the still more interesting force of splendid and illustrious examples. When we attentively contemplate those holy men who were admitted to intimate intercourse with Jehovah, and were the depositories of his will and the subjects of his distinguished favour, we are strongly excited to emulate those virtues which their character and lives inculcate, and by which they rose thus high in the favour of heaven.

* Luke ii. 29, 30.

Let us now, then, seriously consider the character of him who is presented to us in my text; and when we contemplate his virtues as delineated by the evangelist, let us be excited to imitate them, by the inspiring confidence, that with him we shall then see the salvation of God.

“ There was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon ; the same man was *just*.”

His whole conduct was regulated by the precepts of the divine law ; and the blameless tenor of his life was marked by no actions that wounded the feelings, destroyed the peace, or injured the property of others. That sacred rule which reason has written on the hearts of all men, and which the Gospel has published with divine sanctions, of “ doing to others as we would they should do unto us,”* was the rule by which Simeon regulated his conduct. It led him to cultivate not only the virtues of integrity and uprightness, but those active virtues of benevolence and kindness which are the perfection of the exalted virtue of justice. “ He did *justly*, he loved *mercy*, as well as walked humbly with his God.”† Preserving a conscience void of offence towards God as well towards man, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless, he merited and obtained the character of a just or righteous man.

Brethren, unless the unbiassed testimony of our hearts authorize us, after the faithful examination of our lives, to cherish the humble conviction, that, through the grace of God, we regulate our conduct by the precepts of the divine law ; unless we can

* Luke vi. 31.

† Micah vi. 8.

assert the humble claim, that, as far as human frailty will permit, we are just and righteous, all our pretensions to religion are empty and vain. He who impiously presumes that the warmest professions of zeal for the glory of God, and the most punctual and regular discharge of all the public duties of religion, will atone for any acts of injustice or dishonesty, for any violation of those moral virtues that constitute the ornament, the perfection, and the happiness of our nature, however he may flatter his own heart, is obnoxious to the wrath of that almighty Being who cannot be deceived, and who has required, as the only infallible evidence of our love for him, that we keep all his commandments. The dissembling hypocrite may hope, by zealous professions of religion, and by external acts of homage to God, to conceal, or to carry more securely into effect, the purposes of injustice or licentiousness: but on him will certainly be executed the wo denounced against the Pharisees of old—"Wo unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! who cleanse the outside of the cup and platter, but within are full of extortion and excess."* "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?"†

But while Simeon was careful to cherish all the moral virtues, he was not unmindful that they could be rendered acceptable to God only when sanctified by the divine principle of piety and devotion; while he was sedulous and faithful in the discharge of all those duties which his fellow-men could claim from him, he felt the full force of those sacred obligations that bound him to the greatest and best of Beings, his Maker and his God.

* Matt. xxiii. 25.

† Matt. xxiii. 33.

Simeon was not only *just*, he was “devout.”

It is one of those striking and unaccountable inconsistencies that disgrace the character and conduct of man, that while he always stamps with merited disgrace the violation of those duties which he owes to his fellow-men, he himself habitually violates, and, unconcerned, views others violate, those exalted duties which are due to the almighty Maker and Governor of the world. He is ever ready to acknowledge, that the tribute of praise is to be rendered to human excellence, and to acknowledge the lively sense of the obligations to an earthly benefactor. He brands with infamy the apathy that, unmoved, beholds illustrious virtue—that ingratitude which spurns the hand that bestowed distinguished benefits. And yet, (strange inconsistency of human nature!) man, without any concern, forgets his sense of obligation to Him, in whom he lives, and moves, and has his being; he shrinks not from the base ingratitude which he incurs, by remaining unmindful of that heavenly Benefactor from whom cometh every good and perfect gift; he does not indignantly shun that criminal apathy which discerns not, nor adores thy excellence and glory, O Jehovah, from whom emanates every excellence which adorns thy creatures.

Not so the holy saint whose character we are contemplating. “Just” to his fellow-men, Simeon was also “devout” to his God. The contemplation of the excellence and goodness of the Maker of the universe warmed his soul, and drew forth the lively tribute of adoration and praise. The profound sense of his weakness and guilt often prostrated him in earnest confession and supplication before the throne of his almighty Benefactor and sovereign

Judge. From the view of the infinite perfections of that glorious Being who bestowed on him the countless blessings of life, the flame of pious gratitude was kindled and burnt with steady and increasing brightness.

Be it our aim, my brethren, at once to admire and to imitate the devout Simeon. Let piety to God enkindle, cherish, and exalt every moral virtue; be this the sacred spring whence shall flow all the graces and virtues that adorn our lives. Contemplating with holy admiration and gratitude the goodness and glory of him who sits on the throne of the universe, let us worship and fall down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. Be the exercises of devotion our habitual employment and the source of our highest pleasures. Let us glory in the inestimable privilege of being permitted to lay our wants before the throne of our almighty Benefactor, to repose our cares and sorrows on the bosom of our heavenly Parent, and to hold communion with the gracious Father of our spirits. Let every morning renewing his goodness, awaken in our hearts the song of praise; let every evening, still witnessing his unfailing mercy, find us still prostrate at his throne. Daily transgressing his commands, yet daily sustained by his bounty, daily let us implore his mercy and invoke his care. In the temples sacred to his honour, where his mercy-seat is unfolded to the children of men, let us ever be found humble and penitent worshippers; there let us devoutly mingle in the fervent confessions, prayers, and praises, that ascend to his throne; there let us, with penitent and obedient hearts, receive the joyful messages of reconciliation; and above all, there let us with grateful and holy emo-

tions surround the altar, to feast on that bread which cometh down from heaven, and to wash away our sins in the purifying blood of the divine Redeemer.

Blessed is our destiny, if these exalted exercises are here our habitual employment and delight; the feeble and imperfect devotions of earth shall terminate in the pure and rapturous worship of heaven; the strains of time shall be exchanged for the songs of eternity; through the courts of the earthly sanctuary we shall pass into that celestial temple where, with the holy saint whose devotion we have imitated, and with the spirits of the just made perfect, we shall see the salvation of God, and rejoice evermore in the everlasting consolation of Israel.

It was this "consolation of Israel" for whom, we are told in my text, Simeon "waited."

He was "just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel."

With the liveliest solicitude must the holy men among the nation of the Jews have anticipated those blessed days when he, who was emphatically styled the "consolation of Israel," should appear among his people as their God and Saviour. The early promises of Jehovah given in mercy to the first parents of our race and their descendants, had lighted up the expectation, and succeeding prophets had, with luminous and increasing sublimity and clearness, portrayed the divine character and benignant offices of that blessed personage who was to be "a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel;"* while the greater por-

* Luke ii. 32.

tion of the blinded and sensual nation of the Jews, intoxicated with vain ideas of temporal grandeur and dominion, desired and expected a temporal deliverer and king, there were others who, with the devout Simeon, piously and wishfully waited for him as “the *consolation of Israel*”—as that divine and compassionate Saviour who was to “comfort his people, and have mercy on his afflicted”*—who was to be the divine Messenger of the “glad tidings to Zion,” that “the days of her mourning were ended,” and that “the Lord should be her everlasting light, and her God, her glory.”† They waited for him as “the *consolation of Israel*,” as that compassionate Saviour who, bearing the messages of reconciliation, would “preach good tidings to the meek,” would “bind up the broken-hearted,” and “comfort those that mourn.”‡

With what ardent desires must the pious saints of Israel—who, mourning under the weakness and guilt of human nature, felt the inefficacy of all those observances, which were but “shadows of good things to come,” to shed light and peace on their sorrowing spirits—have looked forward to the coming of Him who was to “bring in everlasting righteousness;”§ who, by the sacrifice of himself, was to put away sin, and to perfect for ever his penitent and faithful people! What transport must have swelled the breast of the pious Simeon when, in that blessed babe, whom, with sacred ardour, he pressed to his holy bosom, he beheld the divine “consolation of Israel,” and rejoiced in that salvation which a fallen world had so long desired to behold!

* Isa. xlix. 13.

† Isa. lx. 20.

‡ Isa. lxi. 1, 2.

§ Dan. ix. 24.

My brethren, transports not less ardent should swell our breasts, for our eyes have seen, drawn by the pencil of inspiration, the "consolation of Israel;" we have beheld "the glory of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth,"* who has proclaimed for us the glad tidings that God is in him reconciling the world unto himself. To us has this divine Teacher displayed the glorious attributes of the almighty Father, and those graces and virtues which, by conforming us to the divine image, prepare us for the fruition of divine bliss. For us has he purchased that blessed spirit of sanctification and comfort, by whose mighty power we are raised from the ruins of the fall, and comforted under the sorrows of this wearisome pilgrimage. For us, he, the divine Conqueror, hath stripped of its horrors the dark valley of the shadow of death, and opened the path to those immortal abodes where, in the presence of his Father, there is fulness of joy.

We bless thee, then, O thou consolation of Israel! we ardently desire the full manifestation of thy salvation, enlightening and purifying our hearts, and conforming us to thy holy temper and spotless example; we humbly and supremely confide in thee as the all-sufficient and compassionate Saviour, in whom the guilty find a refuge, the weary and heavy-laden an eternal rest. And with increasing strength and ardour may we advance in the knowledge of the living God, and of thee, O divine Jesus, whom he has sent, and whom to know aright is life eternal.

After having contemplated the character of

* St. John i. 14.

Simeon, his exemplary justice and integrity, his ardent devotion, his holy faith in the promised salvation of God, we are not surprised at the last circumstance which the sacred writer relates of him—that

“The Holy Ghost was upon him.”

His exalted virtues could only have been produced by the agency of that blessed Spirit who is the source of truth and holiness. Simeon indeed possessed not only those celestial graces by which the Holy Spirit enlightens, renews, and consoles the faithful servants of God, but those energetic impulses which animate the soul with prophetic gifts. We are told that “Simeon was led by the Spirit into the temple,” and there beholding the infant Jesus, burst forth in a prophetic display of his future glory, character, and offices.

But in the devout Simeon, as in all the people of God, this divine Spirit dwells with those less splendid, but, in the sight of God, more acceptable graces, love, joy, meekness, faith. It is the office of this blessed Spirit to enlighten, renew, console, guide us to everlasting life. What cause of holy triumph, that while we diligently work out our salvation, God, by his almighty Spirit, worketh in us both to will and to do; that, while we sojourn in this vale of imperfection and tears, God has sent forth the light and the truth of his blessed Spirit, to lead us, to bring us to his holy hill, to himself, our exceeding and eternal joy!

Behold then, my brethren, in the holy saint whose character has been exhibited to you, the exalted standard of moral and religious duty at which you are to aim, and the attainment of which

can alone elevate you among the ranks of the acceptable servants of your God, and qualify you for his favour. "Just," not merely in the restricted sense which renders to all their dues, but in that enlarged application which embraces every duty of personal and social *righteousness*. "Devout," not only acknowledging, and admiring, and venerating the existence, attributes, and providence of God, but habitually rendering to him homage, and manifesting a sense of the obligations that bind you to him, in the reverence, submission, and obedience that characterize your lives. And all your personal, moral, and religious virtues must be animated and controlled by faith in him, whom Simeon "waited for" in holy hope, as "the consolation of Israel," but who is revealed to us as "the Saviour, who is Christ the Lord,"* through whose grace we are to be sanctified, and through whose merits we are to be accepted.

In the attainment of this universal righteousness, this evangelical piety and faith, without which we shall not be partakers of the salvation of God, we are animated by the exalted assurance, that "the Holy Ghost is with us," the power and strength of the third person of the adorable Godhead, inscrutably but effectually operating in us, inspiring us with good desires, and enabling us to bring the same to good effect, creating a clean heart and renewing a right spirit within us, directing us in all our doings with his most gracious favour, and furthering us with his continual help. Let us realize this truth, incomprehensible as it may be to our limited understandings, that, instead of depending

* Luke ii. 11.

solely on our own capricious resolutions, on our own feeble endeavours, we may in watchfulness and prayer, in the worship and ordinances of the sanctuary, seek that strength from above, that power of the Holy Ghost which, in every temptation, however formidable, will be sufficient for us, and in every duty, however arduous, will be made perfect in our weakness.

Constantly then let us cherish the divine but mysterious truth, that in the Holy Spirit of God our virtues have an almighty Guardian, our sorrows a divine Comforter; and let us implore him to shed upon us, as he did upon Simeon of old, not the overpowering blaze of his miraculous *gifts*, but the soft and serene lustre of his celestial *graces*, to be unto us a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of counsel and ghostly strength, a spirit of knowledge and true godliness, and to fill us with the spirit of his holy fear, to defend us from all evil, and especially from the awful guilt of resisting his grace and quenching his holy inspiration. Oh thou blessed Spirit! lead us through all the changes and trials of this mortal life, to that heavenly state where the faith which thou dost now inspire, shall terminate in the blissful vision of the divine glory; and those duties which thou dost now enable us to discharge, shall all be resolved into the exalted work of praising and adoring, for ever and ever, thee, O Holy Ghost, with the Father and the Son, ever one God.

SERMON VII.

DUTIES INCULCATED BY THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD.

ISAIAH lxiv. 8.

But now, O Lord, thou art our Father; we are the clay, and thou art the potter; and we are all the work of thy hand.

THE people of Israel had been visited by the sore judgments of God. The prophet introduces them confessing their sins, acknowledging the justice of those judgments which their sins provoked, and adoring the sovereign power and authority of Jehovah in all his dispensations towards them. “But now, O Lord, thou art our Father”—thou hast made us, and dost guide, and preserve, and govern us; we are under thy almighty discipline and control. “We are the clay, and thou art the potter”—thy power over us is as absolute and sovereign as that of the potter over the clay which he fashioneth according to his will. “We are all the work of thy hand”—and therefore bound to submit to, and adore thy righteous judgments.

All who believe in the being and providence of God, the Maker and Governor of all things, will, in words at least, be ready to acknowledge that they are the creatures of God’s power; that they are subject to his government and control; that his sovereign authority none can resist; and that all the endowments of body and mind, and all the enjoyments and blessings of life, are the gifts of

his bounty. "That they are the clay, and he is the potter; and they are all the work of his hand." But though these truths, revealed in Scripture, are sanctioned by the dictates of reason, and when proposed to the serious and unprejudiced judgment of mankind, will be generally received; yet, even among those who acknowledge them, there are few who properly consider the nature and obligation of the duties which result from them. Instead, therefore, of my attempting to prove or illustrate the sovereign authority of God over us, I shall take this as a truth admitted, and consider the duties that are founded upon it, as the practical part of the subject with which we are immediately concerned.

God is "our Father"—in that sense which makes him the source of our being, our endowments, and all our mercies, we are as absolutely and entirely subject to his control, as the passive "clay" is to the forming hand of the "potter." "We are the work of his hand," and therefore subject to him as dependent creatures to an almighty Creator.

The consideration of the sovereign authority of God over us should

Teach us humility;

It should excite in us the sentiment of dependence;

It should produce profound submission;

It should lead us to render to him homage and obedience.

1. It should teach us *humility*—the humility of temper, and the humility of intellect.

Pride and self-confidence ill become those who possess nothing which they have not received, and

which they do not hold at the will of a superior Being. The creatures who were produced by the fashioning hand of that almighty Creator, whose fiat in an instant would reduce them to the dust from whence they were taken, how idle in them to boast of the endowments which they possess, as if they were original and underived, and held by the certain tenure of their own will! The talents, the wealth, the honour, that for a moment elevate one man above another, what cause are they for the swelling emotions of self-confident pride? Proud man, what has he which he has not received? The distinctions which now excite his vanity and elate his pride, he has derived from the sovereign bounty of that almighty Being, who, if he had seen fit, could have conferred them on another humble individual, whom this vain boaster considers so far beneath him. We are in the hands of that Being, as clay in the hands of the potter, and he may crumble to pieces the pillars that support our pride, and reduce us to a level with those who are now the objects of our scorn. What are the lessons then which our dependence on the sovereign power of our almighty Maker should teach us?—to refer to him all the advantages and distinctions which we possess—to acknowledge them to be the gifts of his bounty, calling for humble gratitude instead of presumptuous pride—to rejoice in the possession of them with trembling, knowing the dependent tenure on which we hold them, the pleasure of God, who giveth not to man an account of his doings—and to adore the sovereign providence of him who is the Author of all our talents, distinctions, and advantages—and thus to acknowledge in deep humility his supreme and resistless authority.

From the unlimited power which God possesses over us, he derives the right to impose on us whatever commands he pleases, and to require our assent to whatever truths he may reveal. The source of intelligence and goodness, as well as of power, he justly claims the homage and obedience of the understandings, and wills and affections of his intelligent creatures. Let not then the human mind, but a ray of intelligence from the infinite and eternal source of reason, disclaim its dependent origin, and oppose its feeble light to the brightness of eternal wisdom. Let not man, the work of God's hands, disclaim the authority of him that made him, and set up his own derivative powers and dependent will, as the standard and source of truth and authority. "Nay but, O man, who art thou that replest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over his clay?"* Hath not the sovereign Being in whose hands thou art, and who is infinite in truth and perfection, a right to require thy assent and obedience to whatever truths and commands he may choose to impose? Is there any source of truth but the eternal mind, any supreme Lawgiver but the almighty Maker who formed thee, any tribunal but that which he has constituted, to which, as a rational agent, thou wilt be called finally to account? Wilt thou presume to set up, independent of him, a standard of truth and virtue in the reason and nature of things? But who constituted the reason and nature of things? Who determined the immutable difference between truth and error, good

* Rom. ix. 20, 21.

and evil, but the infinite, eternal, self-existent Jehovah, the only source of all intellectual, and physical, and moral existence, of all the relations that subsist between them, and all the truths and duties which result from them? We cannot ascertain these truths but as he has revealed them—we must receive these relations as he has determined them. His truths and his will must indeed harmonize with the reason and nature of things, for he has constituted them all. In his truths then we must seek for wisdom—in his will for happiness and good.

The great source of opposition to the will of God arises from an impatience of restraint on the bold flights of reason, from an aversion to acknowledge the revelations of the Eternal as supreme over the deductions and operations of the human mind. An habitual sense of the supreme and righteous authority of God over us, will produce that spirit of deep and unfeigned humility which becomes us as creatures, and will preserve us from that unlicensed impatience of restraint which would lead us to oppose the divine authority and government, which are infinitely perfect, wise and good, and therefore the only guide of our faith, and rule of our conduct. Our sense of the supreme power of the Being who made and sustains us cannot be too strong—our humility cannot be too profound; for we are in his hands as clay in the hands of the potter, fashioned, controlled, and devoted as he pleases.

2. The consideration of the sovereign power and authority of God should also excite the sentiments of *dependence*.

This dependence should be as universal and profound as the power of God is unlimited and entire; extending to all our counsels, to all our thoughts, to all our ways, to all our actions. It is his invisible but ever-present power which preserves our physical and moral faculties, enabling the intellect to search for and discover truth. It is the illuminating and all-powerful grace of his Holy Spirit which leads us to the discernment of spiritual things, and "directs us in the ways of his laws, and in the works of his commandments,"* not only "inspires us with good desires, but enables us to bring the same to good effect."† And it is his providence which overrules all our ways and actions to his sovereign purposes. "In God we live, and move, and have our being."‡ "He ruleth over all,"§ "He is the Author of every good and perfect gift."|| "Without him we can do nothing."¶ This supreme and unbounded agency of God we know does not destroy our free agency, nor irresistibly control our minds. We may not indeed be able to reconcile the free agency of the creature with the supreme power of the Creator; and for what one of the many facts of nature, or of the truths of reason, are we able to account? The most common fact, which is the basis of all our reasonings and all our conduct, that external objects act upon the mind so as to raise accurate ideas of them, and excite our desires and affections, is utterly beyond our comprehension. He, therefore, who rejects, because he cannot account for them, the truths of Scripture, must con-

* See Collect in Communion Service.

† See Collect for Easter Sunday.

§ Psalm ciii. 19.

¶ See Collect for the first Sunday after Trinity.

‡ Acts xvii. 28.

|| James i. 17.

sistently reject the truths of nature ; and then, tossed on the troubled ocean of scepticism, where will he find a rest for his wandering mind ?

My brethren, it is sufficient for us to know that this supreme and universal providence of God is declared in that sacred word which we receive on the most luminous and satisfactory evidence ; and that, transcending as it may, in some respects, our comprehension, reason acknowledges it as a necessary attribute of a supreme and almighty Creator. It is our duty, therefore, in all our ways to acknowledge the sovereign authority and providence of Almighty God, to implore him by his power to preserve and invigorate the faculties of our minds in all their researches and operations, by his grace to enlighten our understandings, to sanctify our hearts, to strengthen us in the discharge of duty, and by his providence to guide and govern us in all our ways. It is our duty to ascribe to his grace and power, strengthening and aiding us in all the good that we perform, all the virtues that adorn and elevate us. It is our duty especially to adore him as the Author of our salvation, as that omnipotent Governor of all things, who, by the influences of his grace and the operations of his providence, is accomplishing in us, and in the world, his own good pleasure.

3. The consideration of the sovereign authority of God over us should produce in us *submission*.

For “ the thunder of his power who can withstand ? ” * Sovereign power merely, though it cannot excite trust and confidence, yet demands im-

* Job xxvi. 14.

plicit submission; and united as it is, in the Maker and Ruler of the universe, with righteousness and mercy, resistance to it would not only be ineffectual, but would display a presumptuous and arrogant assertion of our own will in opposition to infinite wisdom, perfect goodness, and supreme power. "God is greater than man," is the language of inspiration, "why dost thou strive with him?"* "When he gives quietness, who can trouble? and when he hideth, who can behold him?"† "Who is able to stand before him?"‡ "The earth shakes and trembles, the foundations of heaven are moved when he is wroth."§ In his character, as that gracious and merciful Father who knoweth whereof we are made, and remembereth that we are but dust, God calls forth our filial confidence and affection. As that *almighty* Father, in whose hands we are as clay in the hands of the potter; as "a great God, a mighty and terrible, who regardeth not persons nor taketh reward,"|| he claims our submissive fear and reverence. The consideration of the awful sovereignty of God is often necessary to chasten the too familiar fervours of that love which the view of his compassion and goodness is calculated to excite. It is especially necessary to compose and settle in us a spirit of profound and unreserved submission to his will. That resignation which is founded only on a view of his mercy and love, is apt to become restless and importunate; it is apt to reason, that the heavenly Father, who is infinite in compassion, will surely pity the distresses of his children, and remove their afflictions. But unvail the awful majesty of God, and the view

* Job xxxiii. 12, 13.

† Job xxxiv. 29.

‡ 1 Sam. vi. 20.

§ 2 Sam. xxii. 8.

|| Deut. x. 17.

of his sovereign authority represses the spirit of murmuring. “Wo unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou?”* Let us accustom ourselves then, my brethren, with all our views of the mercy and love of God as our heavenly Father, to connect a regard to his supreme and sovereign authority over us. All his attributes claim our homage. Fear and submission are duties which we owe to his sovereignty and power, as well as gratitude and trust to his mercy and compassion. The fervours of love should be chastened by the more sober emotions of holy fear. Submission to his will, as *wise* and *good*, should be strengthened by the consideration that it is *resistless*. It would be as vain as impious to resist him; for “we are the clay, and he is the potter; and we are all the work of his hands.”

4. The consideration of the sovereign power and authority of God over us, should teach us, lastly, the necessity of securing his favour, by rendering to him homage and obedience.

Superior power compels obedience by operating on our interests and our fears. He who “stretcheth forth the heavens; who setteth fast the mountains, being girded about with power; who frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; who turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish; who saith to the deep, Be dry;”† “who stilleth the noise of its waves, and the tumult of the people”‡—he “who kills and makes

* Isa. xlv. 9.

† Isa. xlv. 24, 25, 27.

‡ Psalm lxy. 7.

alive, who wounds and who heals, out of whose hand none can deliver"—he "who is Lord alone of all the kingdoms of the earth,"† is certainly entitled to the homage of the creatures he has made, the subjects of his fearful and resistless power. In his hand, as the clay in the hands of the potter, vainly would they attempt to resist his will.

The folly and presumption of sin are displayed by considering it as a contempt of the authority, and violation of the will of a sovereign and all-powerful God.

The profane swearer, who casts forth his curses and execrations, insults the sacred name, and imprecates the vengeance of that almighty Jehovah, who is able in an instant to seal his blasphemous tongue in silence, or to torment it in inextinguishable flame. The libertine, who riots in licentious pleasure; the drunkard, who wallows in intemperance; the debauchee, who brutalizes himself in sensuality—all are waging war against their Maker, against that almighty Sovereign who is able in an instant to destroy both soul and body in hell. The awful presumption, guilt and danger of the sinner consist in his being the avowed enemy of his almighty Creator, and exposed every instant to be cut off by the stroke of almighty vengeance. Every act of injustice, every trick of fraud, every deed of oppression, in short, every wilful transgression of the law of God, is a contempt of his sovereign authority, because it supposes that he is either too indifferent or too weak to vindicate his violated laws. Ah! though, in merciful forbearance, (well for us, brethren, that it is so,) his anger delay for

* Job x. 7.

† 2 Kings xix. 15.

a while, the crimes of the wicked and ungodly are augmenting its flames, which will at last burst upon them with overwhelming fury. "For the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, and all that do wickedly, shall be as stubble: and the day cometh that shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts."* That great and terrible day—the elements melting with fervent heat, the heavens passing away, the earth consumed by the flames which are rending it asunder, and united with the crash of departing worlds, the despairing cries of condemned sinners, driven to that place where dwells the devouring fire—that day will awfully vindicate the sovereign power and authority of the Maker and Ruler of the universe. Imagination is not drawing unreal scenes—they are the sober and awful delineations of the word of God. Who indeed can, by searching, find out the immensity of his power? What imagination, by her boldest efforts, can display the treasures of that wrath which Jehovah hath in store for his impenitent adversaries?

He who came in great humility to effect the designs of infinite mercy, will come again in the almighty power of the Godhead, to execute the purposes of wrath—of that terrible but *just* wrath which is denounced against those whom the overtures of mercy cannot soften, nor the influences of divine grace subdue; but who continue in their sins, resisting and contemning the righteous authority and power of their almighty Maker and Sovereign. In that day of eternal justice, in that day of almighty vengeance, those only will be able, through the

* Malachi iv. 1.

merits of the divine Mediator, to stand and to abide in peace and safety—who have yielded, through the grace of the divine Sanctifier, entire, unreserved obedience to their almighty Creator—who have humbly received the truths of his revelation—who have devoutly adored the dispensations of his providence—who have implicitly obeyed the requisitions of his righteous laws—and who have thankfully accepted salvation in that way, in which only, according to his sovereign pleasure, he conveys it, through the merits and grace of his Son Jesus Christ.

Is this our character, brethren? do we humbly receive the truths, obey the laws, adore the dispensations, accept the salvation of our almighty Maker? Let the inquiry be immediate—let it be serious—for if this be not our character, alas! there is no safety for us; almighty power is engaged against us—engaged to vindicate, in our punishment, the insulted authority of our Sovereign and our Judge. But if in our understandings, our hearts, our lives, we submit to the dominion of him who has a supreme right to rule us, then his sovereign power will not be an object of dismay to us, but of holy confidence and joy; for it will be exerted for our present peace, for our eternal felicity. Then, not in the alarm and terrors of a guilty spirit, but in the peace and joy of a conscience reconciled to God and assured of his favour, we may reverently but triumphantly adore him. “Thou, O Lord, art our Father; we are the clay, and thou art the potter; and we are all the work of thy hand.”

SERMON VIII.

THE APPEALS OF CHRIST TO THE SINNER.

REV. iii. 20.

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock : if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me.

THIS is the language addressed by Jesus Christ, who is styled the faithful and true witness from the beginning of the creation of God, to the lukewarm and impenitent church of Laodicea. The patient forbearance which he exercised towards her, his solicitude for her recovery from her spiritual insensibility, and his affectionate invitation to this purpose, are denoted by the symbolical allusion of his standing at the door and knocking. Should the impenitent Laodiceans hear his voice and open the door—should they, by humble and lively penitence, faith and obedience, receive and treat him as their Lord and Redeemer—he graciously promises to come in to them, and sup with them, and they with him—they should be restored to his favour and enriched by his blessings.

Alas ! brethren, the church of Laodicea is the emblem of too many professing Christians in every age. By their remissness, their lukewarmness, their sensual pursuits, by their impenitent neglect to fulfil the holy conditions of the covenant of their salvation, they have shut the door of their hearts

against their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. But he stands at the door and knocks. Their ingratitude, their insensibility, their numerous provocations, cannot induce him utterly to forsake them; he still importunes with them to yield him the possession of their hearts, and graciously promises, that if they will hear his voice, and in humble penitence and faith submit to him as their Lord and Saviour, they shall be received into the closest and most endearing union with him, and shall partake of the inestimable blessings of his love and favour.

Lukewarm and unholy Christian! impenitent sinner! who refusest to render to thy Saviour the supreme homage of thy heart and affections—who refusest him admission into that soul which he has redeemed, and which he is desirous to purify by his grace, and to bless with his everlasting favour, how astonishing is his forbearance and his compassion! He sues for admission into that bosom which thou hast closed against him, and urges his solicitation by the exalted promise, that if thou wilt open unto him, he will come in and bless thee.

“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me.”

When we hear this affectionate invitation, we are naturally prompted to contemplate—

The *interesting character* of him who thus solicits admission into our hearts;

The *tender and affecting manner* by which he solicits this admission;

The *reception* which is due from us to a character so interesting, and an invitation so tender and affecting; and

The *blessings* which we shall enjoy in yielding him the possession of our hearts.

Who is he that solicits admission into our souls, to sanctify, to rule, and to bless them?

A personage in himself the most exalted, and sustaining to us the most exalted relations—Jesus Christ the Son of God—he who was with the Father before the world was—he who, from all eternity, was the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his person—he, the Lord of all things, by whom all things were created, and by whom all things consist—Jesus Christ, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, the first and the last, the Almighty. This is indeed a mystery which surpasses our conception, but which claims our profound adoration—a mystery not greater indeed than that divine nature into which there is no searching—not greater than our own nature, which so often baffles our inquiries—not greater than innumerable truths of reason and religion, which command our assent—and a mystery which claims our most profound adoration—the second person in the eternal Trinity, he who, equal with God, was from all eternity partaker of the glory and felicity of the Godhead, sues for admission into our souls.

And in the most exalted and endearing *characters* does he solicit admission.

He claims the possession of our souls as our *Creator*, who formed us out of nothing, and breathed into us an immortal spirit—as our *Preserver*, who sustains us in life, and protects our frail being from

the innumerable dangers which surround us—as our *Benefactor*, who surrounds us with the countless blessings of his providence—and, a character still more endearing and interesting, he presents himself before us and sues for the possession of our hearts as our *Redeemer*, who, for our sakes, endured poverty, scorn, persecution, was buffeted and scourged, and poured forth his life as one forsaken by his God—He who, as our Redeemer, never withdrawing from us his compassion, is constantly interceding for us, sending forth his spirit to guide and sanctify us, and who is preparing for us a place in his own presence.

And what is the *mode* in which he presents his claim to our hearts, to our supreme homage and service?

Having violated, by repeated transgressions, the law of our nature, the dictates of reason and of conscience, the commands of God, as good as he is powerful, it is an act of mercy which spares us, thus sinful and guilty, which rescues us from that prison of darkness where the angels who have sinned are reserved in chains. We deserve only wrath—*wrath* from the Sovereign of the universe. But should our offended God entertain towards us any purposes of mercy, what would be the utmost of our hopes? We might reasonably indeed expect that pardon would not be extended to guilt so aggravated, but on conditions the most rigorous and severe, conditions enforced by the stern voice of violated authority. The utmost that we could hope would be, that these conditions of pardon would be rendered practicable by the divine aid of the Sovereign whom we had offended. But here

again is a mystery which claims our profound adoration. God did not appear to us in the darkness, the tempest, the terrors of Mount Sinai, an inflexible Sovereign and Judge. He unfolds himself to us, his rebellious creatures, in the light, the radiance, the compassion of our heavenly Father. He so loved us, as to send to us his only-begotten Son, not to announce, in the majesty of offended justice, the stern conditions of our pardon, but, in the lowliness of the Lamb of God, to make a propitiation for our sins, in the mild accents of the Prince of Peace, to propose the easy terms of acceptance, and with the tenderness and compassion of our dearest Friend, to invite us to come unto him and receive rest and salvation. And even when insensible to the calls of gratitude and duty, and regardless of our own present and eternal interest, we resolve to continue in our sins, and thus defy the justice of heaven, and trample under foot that mercy which is sealed by the blood of the Son of God; still this almighty Redeemer, who could summon legions of angels to vindicate his insulted glories, becomes the *suppliant*—and the suppliant to the guilty rebels who had rejected him; he stands at the door and knocks; he sues for admittance into our souls; he sues for admittance by those temporal blessings which he still bestows upon us, sinners, who are unworthy of them, and who, while they deserve the vengeance, are thus crowned with the goodness of their almighty Lord. Jesus Christ sues for admittance into our hearts by those chastisements and warnings, by the loss of health and of temporal comforts, by those escapes from impending danger and threatening death, which are calculated to arouse us to a sense of the necessity of

securing our eternal peace by making our Saviour our friend.

Jesus Christ also sues for admittance into our souls by all the *instructions*, all the *promises*, all the *threatenings*, of his holy word.

By the *instructions* of his word he displays the excellence of that divine Being who claims our service—the reasonableness of this service, and of those laws by which God designs to promote the present and eternal happiness of his creatures—which unfold the glory of him who came to save us, the nature of his gracious offices, and the way of salvation through his merits and grace, which, rendering plain to us every part of our duty, leaves us without excuse under the violation of it.

Not only by the instructions of his word does Jesus Christ sue for admittance into our souls, but by all its *promises*. These promises hold out pardon to the penitent, though their sins be as scarlet, and red like crimson—deliverance to the captives of sin, and rest to those who are burdened with sorrow—promises of succour to the tempted, of comfort to the afflicted, of peace to the conscience agitated by guilt, of purity to the soul polluted by transgression, of mercy to cheer, and of grace to strengthen the dejected and feeble—promises of communion with God, the eternal source of goodness and of happiness, of confidence in his favour who is the Sovereign of the universe, of joy in Christ who is the all-sufficient and almighty Saviour, and of the assurance of his full and never-failing mercy—and when the soul has passed her earthly pilgrimage, promises of an eternal and blessed rest from all sin and from all sorrow, of a glorious entrance into the

church triumphant, into the presence of God the Judge of all, of Jesus Christ the Mediator of the new covenant, of angels and archangels, and of the spirits of the just—promises of a felicity increasing through eternal ages.

To render his applications for admittance still more powerful, Jesus Christ unites with his promises the *threatenings* of his word, declaring against those who reject his counsel and will none of his reproof, remorse of conscience, fearful apprehensions of future wrath, despair in death, torment in eternity—unfolding the terrors of that day, when he, the Judge, the almighty Judge, comes to repay vengeance to his adversaries, recompense to his enemies—the day when the ungodly will call on the rocks and mountains to fall on them and to hide them from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb—the day which will reveal every evil thought, every deed of darkness, reveal them in the light of eternity, reveal them before an assembled universe—the day when the sentence shall proceed from the mouth of that Judge (whose solicitations sinners had so often disregarded,) Depart, ye cursed—depart from the holy presence of God, from the glory of his celestial courts, from the blissful society of saints and angels, and the spirits of the righteous—depart from the light, the peace, the never-ending felicity of heaven—depart into outer darkness, into wailing and wo, into the society of the devil and his angels, where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched—depart *for ever!*

Oh! who can dwell with the devouring fire, who can lie down in everlasting burnings!

These are the awful threatenings which Jesus

Christ addresses to sinners, not to fill them with unnecessary terrors, not to destroy their comfort and their happiness, but to awaken them to attend to the things which belong to their peace, before they are for ever hidden from their eyes—to arouse them to seek the Lord while he may be found, to call upon him while he is near. Jesus Christ, ever prosecuting his purposes of mercy, seeks, by these threatenings, to excite those whom promises and invitations cannot allure, to give him admission into their souls.

Not only by the instructions, the promises, and the threatenings of his word, but by the checks and warnings of *conscience* and his *Holy Spirit*, does he seek to induce us to open our hearts to him, to yield him homage and obedience. Every reflection which arises in our minds on the guilt and danger of our evil ways; every apprehension of future wrath; every emotion of sensibility to the exercises and joys of religion; every desire after the favour of God; every sentiment of sorrow for having offended him; every resolution to return to that God and Saviour whom, by our sins, we have so greatly offended; all these are the gracious applications to us, by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, to open our hearts to him, our Lord and Master, our compassionate Saviour, our best Friend.

By the ministrations, and by the sacraments of his church, does this benevolent Redeemer, never weary in his work of mercy, seek to accomplish the same gracious purpose.

In the sanctuary, his gracious voice is heard, beseeching us to turn from our evil ways, and to be reconciled unto God. In the preaching of the word, we are presented with a view of the guilt, the

misery, the corrupting bondage of sin, contrasted with the exalted purity and joy of a conscience cleansed from guilt by the mercy, and redeemed from sin by the grace of Christ, we behold displayed the glory of the Saviour's character, his tenderness, his compassion, his long-suffering, his numberless and unparalleled acts of love to us, his willingness and his power to save. Through every avenue the Saviour has sought to gain admission into our hearts.

Hear him addressing us in those services of the sanctuary, by which, confessing our sins, supplicating his grace and mercy, and proclaiming his praise, we may obtain his favour. Hear him calling us, in the sacrament of baptism, to forsake a world which lieth in wickedness and is obnoxious to the wrath of God, and to enter into the fold of salvation, that holy church where forgiveness of sins is extended to the penitent, and mercy and grace dispensed to the believing and obedient. He calls us in this holy sacrament to forsake a state of sin and death, and to make our abode in that Zion which is none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven, and which prepares its faithful members for exchanging the imperfect praises of an earthly sanctuary for the pure, and full, and endless songs of the blest in the temple above, the celestial Zion. Thus born of water and of the Holy Ghost in baptism, made members of Christ, children of God, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven, he provides for our renewing by the Holy Ghost, for our effectual and continual death unto sin, and new birth unto righteousness. In the apostolic ordinance of confirmation, the laying on of hands, he calls us to assume our baptismal engagements, to die to sin

and to rise again to righteousness, that thus our souls, established in holiness, may be made meet for him to dwell in, and prepared for the glories of our heavenly inheritance. And here, by the chief minister of his church, he assures the humble and the faithful of his favour and goodness to them, and renewedly pledges to them the strengthening influences of the Holy Ghost the Comforter. In the sacrament of the supper, showing him forth as the Lamb of God slain for us, he beseeches us, by his agony and bloody sweat, by his cross and passion, by his precious death, by his glorious resurrection, to open our souls to him, that he may wash them from sin, that he may nourish and strengthen them to everlasting life. Blessed Jesus! innumerable are the ways by which thou dost display thy forbearance and compassion towards us, by which thou dost sue for admittance into our guilty souls. Thou dost stand at the door of our hearts and knock, not as a stern and rigorous sovereign demanding admittance, but as a tender and compassionate friend, whose importunate solicitations increase even with the increase of our insensibility and provocations. Thy gracious voice is heard in the blessings and in the chastisements of thy providence, in the instructions, the promises, and the threatenings of thy word, in the checks of conscience, in the strivings of thy Holy Spirit, in the ministry, and the sacraments, and the ordinances of thy church. In all these we hear thee suing us to admit thee, who art the only life of our souls, our only defender from the terrors of divine justice, our only guide, through death and the grave, to the glories of immortality.

And what *reception*, brethren, should this blessed

Redeemer receive from us? what effect should invitations so tender and affecting produce upon us? If every emotion of sensibility be not chilled in our bosoms, if we are not wholly insensible to our dearest interests, it is impossible that these inquiries can appear uninteresting.

When Jesus Christ sues for admittance into our hearts, we should hear his voice and open unto him—we should hear his voice with the emotions of *penitence*.

When we contemplate the infinite dignity, the exalted excellence of his character; when we reflect on the numerous and tender invitations by which he seeks to gain admission into our hearts, we should be impressed with his forbearance and love towards us; and with a deep conviction of our own insensibility and ingratitude in having so long and so often slighted a Friend and Saviour so condescending and tender, we should no longer turn a deaf ear to the invitations of the Redeemer, who has so long supplicated us to grant him a place in our bosoms; we should become suppliants, and prostrate at the feet of our compassionate and long insulted Saviour; we should implore him—Enter in, Lord, and take possession of the souls which thou hast redeemed, but which have been too long estranged from thee, too long slighted thy grace and contemned thy mercy—enter in, Lord, and dwell in them as their Saviour and their Lord.’

By faith also we must hear the voice of the Saviour, and open our hearts to him.

It is by faith indeed that we realize the divine glory of his character, and receive him in all his

gracious offices ; as our Prophet, to instruct us in divine truths ; as our Priest, to atone for our sins ; and our King, to rule over us. It is by faith that we realize the fulness of his love for us, the all-sufficiency of his power, and his infinite willingness to save us. It is by faith that we embrace all his precious promises, trusting in those merits which are our only defence from the demands of incensed justice, and confiding in that grace which, made perfect in our weakness, enables us to overcome the enemies of our salvation, and purifying us from sin, makes our souls a fit habitation for the Lord of glory. “ Lord, I hear thy voice,” is the language of the believing soul ; “ I acknowledge thee to be the only-begotten Son of the Father, the only Mediator between God and man. Enter in and dwell in my soul, for thy blood only can cleanse it from guilt, thy grace only redeem it from sin. Thou alone art my refuge from the condemning accusations of conscience, from the terrors of divine justice ; thou only art my deliverer from the prison of the tomb ; thou only art my guide to the glories of immortality ; and thou wilt be the fulness of my joy through the ages of eternity.”

And lastly, my brethren, we hear the voice of the Saviour and open our hearts to him, by yielding, through his Spirit exciting and aiding, sincere *obedience* to all his commands—imbibing that meek, that tender, that forgiving spirit which distinguished him—following the holy example which he left us—like him, ever intent on doing the will of our Father in heaven—striving to adorn his doctrine in all things—walking in all his commandments and ordinances blameless—instant in prayer, not sloth-

ful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. When we thus render Jesus Christ sincere, supreme, and universal obedience, he becomes established in our souls—he takes complete possession of them.

And what are the *blessings* that proceed from this admittance of Jesus Christ into our hearts?

They are expressed in figurative language—"I will sup with him, and he with me." The most intimate and affectionate communion subsists between Christ and the soul who thus receives him. Jesus Christ is his friend and brother—God his reconciled God and Father—his sins, however many, are forgiven—his conscience, however agitated, is soothed to peace—his soul, however polluted by sin, is purified and established in holiness: a "spiritual feast" is prepared for him—the approving testimony of a conscience reconciled unto God—confidence in the protection of him who is able to save and to destroy, and who hath promised to make all things work together for good to those who love him—joy in the favour of him whose favour is life, whose loving-kindness is better than life—trust in that Saviour who is constantly interceding for him, who is preparing for him mansions of bliss eternal in the heavens—a foretaste of those celestial and everlasting joys reserved in heaven for the servants of God: these are the joys which Jesus Christ dispenses to those in whose souls he dwells; he nourishes them with divine truths, he strengthens them by his grace, he feeds them with the bread of life—with divine and everlasting joys.

What then shall prevent us from hearing his voice and opening unto him? He stands at the door and knocks. He solicits admission by his

blessings and by his chastisements, by the instructions, the promises, and the threatenings of his word, by the monitions of conscience and the strivings of his Spirit, by the ministrations, the services, and the ordinances of his church—by all these powerful methods he solicits us.

But with us it rests to hear his voice, to open our hearts to him. This, through his grace, we are able to do. Jesus Christ does not force admittance, he does not by his almighty grace overpower our inclinations. He stands at the door and knocks; and his very declaration, that if we will hear his voice and open unto him, he will come in, implies, that hearing his voice and opening unto him must depend, through his grace exciting and aiding, on ourselves.

What then shall prevent us from hearing the voice of this gracious Saviour—from opening our hearts to this our compassionate and almighty Friend? Shall the world, its sinful pursuits and passions, exclude him from our souls? Ah! the world is soon to pass away—the world is to be consumed by the breath of God's displeasure—and the world we must soon leave, its enjoyments we must soon relinquish; and if Jesus Christ has not taken possession of our souls, they will become the seats of remorse, of anguish, of never-ending misery. Yes, blessed Jesus, in excluding thee from our souls, we exclude from them the light of heaven, the light of joy—we draw over them the darkness of the place of wo, the darkness of endless despair.

Brethren, if you have any regard for the welfare of your immortal souls, any desire for a felicity that knows no end, any terror for an anguish that never terminates, any sensibility to the tender and press-

ing invitations of the Saviour who died for you, who intercedes for you, who implores you to be saved, open your hearts to him, hear his voice; resist not the monitions and strivings of his Spirit; listen to his instructions, live a life of faith in him, obey his laws, attend on his ordinances, submit to his grace; he will come in and sup with you, he will enrich your souls with every virtue, he will refresh them with the present joys, he will save you from that prison of despair to which those are consigned who reject his invitation, and where no sounds are heard but weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth; and he will receive you into those celestial courts, where you shall join in the never-ceasing chorus of praise and joy, and shall celebrate with him the everlasting festival of love, enjoying the ineffable and ceaseless communications of his favour and his bliss through endless ages.

SERMON IX.

PARABLE OF THE MARRIAGE FEAST.

MATT. xxii. 3.

And he sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come.

Thus contemptuously was the invitation of the king rejected, who made a marriage festival for his son; in which parabolic history is conveyed much important instruction.

The mode of conveying religious and moral truths by parables, which are similitudes drawn from the objects of nature, or from civil and social institutions, was frequently practised by our blessed Lord. It is a mode of instruction founded in the reason and nature of things; for from the peculiar character of spiritual truths, we cannot receive the full and clear knowledge of them, except by analogy with those things which are the objects of our sense and consciousness. The parabolic mode of instruction was also prompted by a regard to the genius of the people among whom our Lord dwelt, which led to the use of highly figurative language; and at all periods, and among all people, it is gratifying to the imagination, and peculiarly calculated forcibly and permanently to impress the heart. Especially where the object is to convey reproof, or to enforce unwelcome or irritating truths, parables afford an opportunity of indirectly, yet effectually,

answering these purposes, without alarming the prejudices or immediately exciting the resentment of the persons accused or opposed.

For all these reasons, but especially for the last, our Saviour so frequently spake by parables. His mission was to a disobedient and gainsaying people—a people blinded by their prejudices and enslaved by their vices. These prejudices and vices were deeply opposed to the pure and self-denying spirit of that kingdom which he came to establish; and to have combated them by direct attack would have so strongly awakened the pride of the Jews and enkindled their resentment, as not only to have precluded all hope of his instructions and reproofs making any impression on their hearts, but to have exposed him to persecution, and prematurely, “before his hour was come,”* endangered his life. Hence it became a dictate of prudence to veil his reproofs and unwelcome instructions under the pleasing garb of allegory; thus exciting the imagination and awakening the attention, and before prejudice or resentment could be roused, impressing the understanding and gaining the heart.

On one of these delicate and unpleasant occasions was the parable delivered which I mean now to set before you.

The immediate object of our Saviour was to reprove the Jews for their incredulity, to impress on them their guilt and ingratitude in rejecting the exalted blessings of that dispensation of mercy which he came to proclaim, to denounce the awful judgments which would overtake them for their sin in rejecting him who came to save them, and for

* St. John vii. 30.

persecuting unto death the messengers of his salvation. It was his object to proclaim to them the determination of their almighty Sovereign to exclude them from the privileges of his chosen people on account of their unbelief, and to receive the believing Gentiles as his covenant people, and thus finally to teach them that their being "called" to be the peculiar people of the Most High would be of no avail to them; on the contrary, would only enhance their guilt and their condemnation, unless they exercised those holy and obedient dispositions and virtues which would qualify them for being finally "chosen" to everlasting life.

These were most important and solemn, but, to the Jews, most unwelcome truths, calculated to mortify their pride and to excite their deadly resentment. Our Lord, therefore, chose to convey them through the medium of an appropriate allegory, which softened without weakening their force.

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king which made a marriage for his son."*

By the kingdom of heaven in this passage, and many other parts of Scripture, is meant, not the final kingdom of bliss eternal in the heavens, but the preparatory kingdom of God on earth, the Gospel dispensation. Thus, John the Baptist announced the introduction of this dispensation in the solemn call—"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven," the kingdom of the Messiah on earth, the Gospel dispensation, "is at hand."† This dispensation, on account of its rich and exalted blessings, and of the joy which these blessings are calculated to inspire, is very properly compared to a feast made

* Matt. xxii, 2.

† Matt. iii. 2.

by a king on the most felicitous occasion that could occur—"the marriage of his son."

"And he sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: but they would not come."

The invitation was renewed in terms the most courteous and pressing.

"He sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage."*

One would suppose that the perverse incredulity which rejected the former invitation, would be subdued by this generous and affectionate renewal of it; but

"They made light of it, and went their way, one to his farm, and another to his merchandise."†

And to complete their criminality,

"The remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them."‡

Astonishing as was their conduct, it was an exact exhibition of the crimes of the Jews. Their forefathers had turned a deaf ear to the voice of the prophets, seeking to reclaim them from their corrupt and idolatrous ways to the fear, the service, and the favour of the living God. Reluctant to execute upon them the fierceness of his just anger, God sent forth his messenger, John the Baptist, to warn them of his judgments, and to invite them to prepare for that dispensation of mercy which the long expected Messiah was to proclaim. By him, the hope of his people Israel, did the Lord their God unfold to the Jews the rich blessings of his grace,

* Matt. xxii. 3, 4.

† Matt. xxii. 5.

‡ Matt. xxii. 6.

and invite them to come unto him and be saved. The apostles whom this blessed Redeemer sent forth to his lost sheep of the house of Israel, renewed the gracious invitation, and urged it by every motive that could alarm their fears or animate their hopes; but “they made light of it”—“they would not come.” Blinded by their prejudices, and enslaved by their corrupt passions, they preferred the sensual gratifications of the world to the pure and heavenly blessings of the Redeemer’s kingdom. The invitations of mercy, instead of awakening their gratitude, kindled the resentment and malice of their hearts. They took the messengers who bore from their heavenly Sovereign the overtures of peace, and “treated them spitefully, and slew them.” The faithful warnings of the Baptist they disregarded, and he finally paid for his fidelity the forfeit of his life. The Lord of glory, who came to save them, they loaded with insults, and they terminated his career of benevolence in the horrors of an ignominious death. The fury that thus drank the blood of the Master, pursued his servants. And the apostles, who sought to bring their blind and unhappy countrymen to participate of the blessings of redeeming mercy, were assailed by cruel mockings and scourgings, and finally persecuted unto death.

The judgments inflicted on this guilty people are awfully displayed in the next verse of the parable.

“When the king heard thereof, he was wroth; and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burnt up their city.”*

In the awful fulfilment of this denunciation, Jeru-

* Matt. xxii. 7.

saalem was "trodden under foot;" "one stone" of that obdurate city which had "killed the prophets, and stoned those who were sent unto her, was not left upon another;"* and all its guilty inhabitants, after encountering the horrors of famine, "fell by the sword" of invading armies.

The invitation to the Gospel feast, thus rejected by the Jews, was addressed to the Gentiles.

"They who were bidden were not worthy. The king therefore said to his servants, Go ye into the highways and hedges, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went to the highways, and gathered all as many as they could find, both good and bad: and the wedding was furnished with guests."†

It was perfectly consistent with Eastern hospitality, to invite the stranger and the pilgrim to share in the pleasures of their feasts. And thus does the parable denote the calling of the Gentiles. They who, in a spiritual sense, were journeying along the highways and hedges, "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise,"‡ were called to partake of those Gospel privileges which the Jews contemptuously rejected. The merciful invitation was restrained by no exceptions; all, "both good and bad," were invited to the Gospel feast; "the sick," as well as they who were comparatively "whole;" "publicans and sinners," as well as they who were comparatively righteous, were called to partake of the blessings of salvation. The call was that of the evangelical prophet—"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money,

* Matt. xxiii. 37.

† Matt. xxii. 8, 9, 10.

‡ Eph. ii. 12.

come ye, buy and eat.”* And the merciful invitation was not addressed in vain to insensible hearts; “for many came from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south, and sat down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God;”† while they, for whom these blessings were primarily designed, “the children of the kingdom,” the unbelieving Jews, were finally “shut out.”

But shall we conclude from the gracious extension of the invitation to all, both “good and bad,” that no qualifications were required in these guests at the heavenly banquet, and that, therefore, the salvation of the Gospel is unconditional, and bestowed on all, whatever may be their character and conduct? A conclusion so erroneous and dangerous, is effectually repelled by the parable; for

“When the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man who had not on a wedding garment.”‡

It was the custom in the East to come to the marriage banquet in a splendid garment, and to appear without one was considered as a mark of great disrespect to the master of the feast. But it may be asked, with what justice could the guest in the parable, who is represented as hastily called from the highways and hedges, be censured for appearing without a wedding garment, to procure which, he had not the time, even if he possessed the means? It was customary at these entertainments for the master of the feast, in all cases, to provide a wedding garment for the less opulent of his guests; and if elevated by rank and great wealth,

* Isa. lv. 1.]

† St. Luke xiii. 29.

‡ Matt. xxii. 11.

to furnish with these garments all his guests indiscriminately. The man, therefore, who appeared at the feast in this parable without the customary garment, had really no excuse; and when censured for doing so, we are told he was "speechless."

The insult of which he was therefore guilty towards the master of the feast, whose hospitality he was partaking, drew forth the sentence,

"Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

Cast this guest, who is guilty of the gross indignity of rejecting the wedding garment prepared for him, from the light and splendour of the scene which he disgraces by his presence, into the darkness of the highway from which he was called.

Here we behold, under a striking similitude, the fearful doom of those professing Christians who think they shall enjoy the blessings of Christ's heavenly kingdom, of his everlasting festival of love, while they are destitute of those graces and virtues, that purity and righteousness, which are often, in the figurative language of Scripture, styled the "wedding garment"—"the white raiment of the saints."† For

"Many are called, but few are chosen."‡

Many are called to the Gospel feast—many are invited to partake of its blessings, and all are offered, through the influences of the Holy Spirit, that righteousness which alone can qualify them to partake of these blessings—"but few are chosen;" comparatively few study to make their calling and election sure; to acquire, through the power of

* Matt. xxii. 13.

† Rev. iii. 4.

‡ Matt. xxii. 14.

divine grace, those holy dispositions and virtues which alone can render them meet to be admitted to the marriage supper of the Lamb, to partake of the felicities of heaven.

This parable contains much important instruction.

1. It affords a lively display of the mercy and goodness of God, in providing for the blessings of redemption.

What scenes more joyous than those of a marriage, where rank and splendour unite to inspire the most dignified festivity? What more grateful and exhilarating on this joyful occasion, than a feast, where every luxury that generous wealth can bestow, excites and gratifies the senses? Behold the striking similitude by which are denoted the goodness and the mercy of God in providing the blessings of redemption. For man, blind, and guilty, and miserable, who was wandering in the high way that leads to destruction, and exiled through sin from the comforts of God's favour, a feast is prepared. The almighty Sovereign, whom, by his wilful transgressions, he has insulted and offended, in the fullness of infinite love provides for him the richest blessings. The offender against the Majesty of heaven, he is offered a free and full pardon. The slave of error and of prejudice, whose corrupt reason enveloped him with the darkest shades of idolatry and superstition, he sees the light of the divine glory in the face of Jesus Christ. His soul held in bondage by sin, he is offered a translation into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. His bosom agitated by passions fierce as the whirlwind, he is presented with that peace of God which passeth all understanding. He, who sprung from the

dust, is descending to the dust again, and may say to corruption, Thou art my father, and to the worm, thou art my brother and my sister, beholds prepared for him a garment of immortality, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. And he, whose guilty soul, the bottomless pit opens to receive, may look, as his destined abode, to the courts of heaven, to that city of the living God, where are joy and gladness, and from which sorrow and sighing flee far away.

2. The merciful and gracious God who prepares for his offending creatures blessings so exalted, urges their acceptance of these blessings by the most powerful and persuasive methods.

He sent his only Son into the world, that, moved by this astonishing instance of love, guilty man might be induced to accept the salvation which, through the sufferings and death of this glorious personage, is wrought for him. The word of inspiration, affording a lively display of all those blessings which God has prepared for those that love him, abounds with the most animating calls, the most urgent and tender entreaties to accept these blessings. By the admonitions of conscience, by the dispensations of his providence, by the secret suggestions of his Holy Spirit, by the service of the church in her ministry, sacraments, and ordinances, does that compassionate God, who willeth not the death of a sinner, urge and entreat him to turn from those sinful pursuits that terminate in shame, remorse, and misery, and to partake of those permanent and exalted joys which flow from him, who is the fountain of life and felicity. The voice of their almighty Sovereign is constantly addressed to sinful men—"All things are ready." Blessings are pre-

pared for you, as transcendent in the enjoyment which they afford, as they are lasting in duration; the light of divine truth, the pardon of sin, peace of conscience, the comforts of the Holy Ghost, the joys of the divine favour, a resurrection to glory, ineffable bliss in the kingdom of heaven above, these are the blessings which court your acceptance. Come then and “drink of the waters of life;” eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Come, celebrate with angels and archangels, and all the company of heaven, that celestial festival, the joys of which are pure, transporting, and eternal.

In what manner is this gracious invitation regarded among men? The parable before us affords the astonishing, the melancholy information—“They make light of it;” they make light of the overtures of mercy from the God of heaven; they make light of the tender invitations of his eternal Son. “They go, one to his farm, and another to his merchandise”—they prefer the sensual pursuits and pleasures which too often corrupt the heart, and fill it with shame and remorse—pursuits which often terminate in vanity and vexation of spirit—pleasures which, in a few years, will vanish in the darkness of the grave, and which, for a day or an hour they cannot call their own, to those pure joys of a good conscience, those rich consolations of the divine favour, those pleasures in the presence of their God and Saviour which never fade. Contemning that great salvation revealed in the Gospel, they too, like the unbelieving Jews of old, “trample under foot the Son of God, crucify him afresh, and put him to an open shame.”*

* Heb. x. 29.

These despisers of God may behold in the parable under consideration, the awful vengeance which will overtake them. They may behold it in the denunciations of that parable executed upon the unbelieving Jews and upon impenitent Jerusalem. Alas ! the awful fury which burst upon Jerusalem and overwhelmed the Jews, is a sure but a feeble emblem of the vengeance preparing for those who despise or neglect the mercy and grace of God. A great and terrible day is coming, when the sun shall be turned into blackness, and the moon into blood; when the elements shall melt with fervent heat; when the heavens shall depart as a scroll; when the earth shall be burnt up; and when, in the midst of these scenes of terror, the Judge of the world shall appear in the glory of his Father, and with his holy angels, to take vengeance on those who believe not God and obey not his Gospel. Such a day is predicted; such a coming of the Son of man is foretold; such awful scenes are unfolded in the oracles of truth. When this day comes; when the Son of man thus appears; when the last judgment takes place, which decides for ever the happiness or misery of the myriads of mankind; oh! how will all who now live unmindful of their God and Saviour, neglecting or contemning his mercy and his grace, bewail their guilt and their folly—bewail, but too late—their tears and their cries will be those of endless agony and despair; for God hath pronounced, the “worm dieth not,” “the fire is not quenched.”

But this instructive parable does not only denounce vengeance against those who reject the counsel of God for their salvation; it unfolds also the awful destiny of nominal Christians; of those

who hold the truth in unrighteousness; who hope they shall be admitted to the celestial festival of their Lord in his kingdom on high, though they are destitute of the wedding garment, the righteousness of the saints; who found their title to heaven on their being called by the name of Christ, and on their calling him, Lord, Lord, while they are destitute of his spirit, his meek and holy graces, and neglect to do the things which he commands. Nominal professors of Christianity! you may read your destiny in the doom pronounced on the man in the parable, who appeared at the marriage supper, not having on the wedding garment—"Cast him into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* This will be the destiny of the unholy professors of the Christian name; excluded from the light, and peace, and glory of heaven, and consigned to darkness everlasting. Oh! that unsound and nominal Christians, alarmed by the consideration of the tremendous destiny which awaits them, would instantly renounce their false hopes, and not give rest to their souls, until, by prayer and watchfulness, and the faithful use of the means of grace, they are adorned with that evangelical righteousness which only can make them acceptable guests at the heavenly supper of their Lord.

Finally, Christian brethren, the concluding moral of this interesting parable should sink deep into our hearts.

"Many are called, but few are chosen"†

Many are called by the word, the Spirit, and the providence of God, by the ministry and ordinances

* Matt. xxii. 13.

† Matt. xxii. 14.

of his holy church, to the privileges and blessings of the Gospel. But, alas! few, comparatively few, walk worthy of their holy vocation—comparatively few improve the grace freely given to them, to the renewal of their minds, to their establishment in holiness and virtue, to their living righteously, soberly, and godly in the world. And therefore, though “many be called” to the marriage supper of the Lamb, though many are admitted to the privileges of Christ’s church on earth, “few are chosen” to sit down with him at this holy and blissful festival: and banished from the presence of their Lord, with whom is light, and peace, and felicity, their portion is in outer darkness—darkness for ever the darkness of despair.

My brethren, let it be our supreme care to avoid this tremendous destiny. Let us earnestly implore him who is the Lord of all power and might, to endue our souls with that righteousness which only can render us meet for his presence. And to our earnest supplications let us add our zealous and unremitting endeavours to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things; so that when our Lord cometh to unite to himself, in the ties of celestial and endless fellowship, the church of the redeemed; when the awakening invitation is heard from the host of heaven—“Be glad and rejoice, for the marriage of the Lamb is come;” we shall be found worthy to enter in and celebrate with him the everlasting festival of love and of joy.

SERMON X.

THE RULE OF FINAL JUDGMENT.

ACTS x. 34, 35.

Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

AFTER that lamentable event "which brought death into the world and all our wo," all flesh corrupted their way before God. The sinful propensities of our fallen nature overcoming the feeble dictates of reason, there was danger that the knowledge and fear of the great Creator and Governor of the universe would be totally extinguished in the earth. To restore men from this moral degradation, and to preserve among them his name, his worship, and service, it pleased God, at sundry times, to reveal himself to the patriarchs, and finally more fully to his chosen people Israel. In the midst of the darkness of idolatry which overspread the nation, they were selected to preserve the knowledge of the one living and true God, until the fulness of time came, when he should send forth his Son to proclaim his salvation to all the ends of the earth.

But, as was natural, from the pride of human nature, the Jews became elated with their spiritual distinctions, and they fancied that their law should last for ever. It was indeed to be continued in that spiritual dispensation which was to be the fulfilling

both of the law and the prophets, and to the blessings of which the Gentiles should be admitted; but they supposed it was to be perpetuated in those ceremonial institutions which confined God's covenant favour to their own nation. This restrictive idea of the nature and extent of God's mercy in the promised Messiah, was contrary to the original promise to Abraham, that in his seed all the families of the earth should be blessed; it was contrary to the voice of the prophets, declaring that all the ends of the earth should see the salvation of God; yet it was rigidly cherished by the Jews. Even the apostles of him who came to give his life a ransom for *all*, were influenced by its contracted spirit; they supposed that redemption should extend only to Israel, and that the fold of the Messiah was inaccessible except through the narrow door of legal ceremonies.

This opinion swayed the apostles even after their Master had commissioned them to preach the Gospel to *all nations*. To correct an error so fundamentally opposed to the design of the Gospel, a miraculous vision was vouchsafed to Peter. In this vision, under an emblematic representation of a sheet let down from heaven containing various animals, some of which, according to the Jewish law, were unclean, but which Peter was directed to eat, he was taught that the ceremonial distinctions of the Jewish law were abolished, and that the church of God was thenceforward opened to all nations. As an evidence of this, he was commanded to attend some messengers sent to him from Cornelius, a devout Gentile, who desired to be taught the things belonging to the kingdom of God. Thus miraculously instructed in God's gracious purpose

to grant to the Gentiles repentance unto life, Peter opened his discourse with Cornelius in the words of my text—"Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him."

Here then, brethren, we behold the important character in which God will judge mankind, and the impartial rule by which he will determine his favour to them.

The *statement* of the doctrine contained in the text, the *proof* of it, and the *inferences* deducible from it, must be particulars interesting to us all, and shall be the object of the following discourse.

The text declares the general truth, that God is no respecter of persons; but that he accepts men according to the fear and service which they render him. This principle may be considered in its application to *those destitute of the light* of the Gospel, and to *those who enjoy its light*.

"God is no respecter of persons." All men deriving their being from him, and equally dependent upon him, he considers them as equally his children, and deals with them all by an impartial rule—the fear and service which they render him. No external qualifications or advantages which men possess, in any degree influence the decisions of the holy and just Governor of the universe concerning their spiritual state. No descent from any particular nation, however distinguished by his temporal favours, on which descent the Jews prided themselves, will affect his just determination concerning their spiritual character. Nor does he regulate his final favour to mankind merely by his arbitrary

pleasure. As it respects, indeed, the spiritual privileges which he confers on men in *this life*, he exercises the power of the potter over his clay, to "create one vessel to honour, and another to dishonour."* He pours on some the full splendour of Gospel truth, while he dispenses to others only the faint light of reason and nature. Still, in every nation, they that fear him and work righteousness, according to the measure of religious knowledge and aid which they enjoy, are accepted with him. "The Judge of the whole earth will do right." The moral qualities of his intelligent creatures are the only standard by which he will finally regulate his favours to them. "He will judge every man according as his work shall be."†

Let us apply this general principle to those *destitute of the light of the Gospel*. The state of the heathen world excites many interesting inquiries in the benevolent mind; and the text satisfies these inquiries, by declaring the standard by which God will judge those to whom it has not pleased him to vouchsafe his revealed will. He accepts them according to the fear and service which they render him. If they cultivate the knowledge of him which they have received from tradition, and which nature, and reason, and conscience, confirm; if adoring his power who made the universe, they fear to offend him who is as omnipotent to destroy as he is to save; if rendering homage to his goodness, they devote themselves to him in whom they live, and move, and have their being; if obeying his voice speaking to them through the dictates of reason and conscience, it is their study, as far as

* Rom. ix. 21.

† Rev. xx. 13.

the infirmity of their nature will admit, to “work righteousness,” they will be accepted by that merciful Parent whose creatures and children they are. God will judge them independently of those disadvantages over which they have no control; he will accept them according as their work shall be. Cornelius was an alien from the commonwealth of Israel, and a stranger to the covenant of promise; he lived among those Gentile nations who, when compared with the light which shone upon Israel, may be said to have sitten in darkness and the shadow of death, yet he is styled “a devout man, one who feared God with all his house, and gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.”* And because he was thus pious and holy, though he was not in external covenant with God, he was accepted—“his prayers and his alms came up for a memorial.”† He was accepted before the offer of the Gospel was made to him. And he was still further accepted, by being received, through the miraculous ministry of Peter, into the Christian fold. Here he enjoyed superior means of virtue, superior spiritual aid, and the prospect of superior reward. In the present state of the world, there are large portions of mankind who, like Cornelius, are aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise. Destitute of the light of divine truth, of the knowledge of a Saviour, of the means of grace, of the hope of glory, their spiritual condition is more deplorable than was that of Cornelius. From his vicinity to God’s favoured people, to whom appertained the adoption, and the covenant, and the giving of the law, and

* Acts x. 2.

† Acts x. 4.

the promises, he possessed means of spiritual instruction far superior to those now enjoyed by vast portions of the heathen world. Still it is true at the present day, that in every nation, even though destitute of God's revealed will, they who fear him and work righteousness are accepted with him; they are accepted through the merits of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, of that Saviour who gave himself a ransom for all. Obscure, and in many respects erroneous, is their knowledge of the God who made and preserves them; superstitious and imperfect is the homage which they render him; feeble and partial are the intimations of duty afforded by natural conscience, by the glimmering light of reason and tradition; in them too the Divine Spirit, given only in an inferior measure, exerts only in an inferior degree his life-giving power; the hope of immortality, excited only by the dubious deductions of reason and the uncertain dictates of their feelings, sheds only a faint light on the darkness of the grave. Oh! how precious to Christians should be that blessed Gospel which displays in full lustre, and rests on the testimony of God himself, these most interesting truths—how distinguished the privileges of Christians on whom has shone the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ—and how earnestly should they desire and labour to extend to the benighted nations, that Gospel which enlightens with divine truth the path of this life, and prepares those who obey it for more exalted glory in the life to come. Still God the Father is no respecter of persons; and, therefore, in whatever degree the unenlightened heathen know, fear, and serve him, thus far they will be accepted—thus far they will be re-

warded. For where a man has a willing mind, he is accepted according to what he has, and not according to what he has not.

There is another particular in which, personally, we are more deeply concerned. What is God's rule of judgment concerning those who enjoy the light of the Gospel? Here it is equally true that God is no respecter of persons.

Where the Gospel is proclaimed, he has offered to all men a Saviour; through the atonement of this Saviour salvation is attainable by them all—the means of grace are within the embrace of all—the hope of glory is offered to them all—all may come and drink of the waters of life—all may, through faith and patience, inherit the promises. And under the Gospel dispensation, as under the light of reason and nature, the standard by which all men shall be judged is their fearing God and working righteousness. More, much more than will be exacted of virtuous heathens, will be required of those who enjoy the light of the Gospel. To them a Saviour is proclaimed, the only-begotten Son of God, full of grace and truth, and they must from the heart believe in him. This divine Saviour brings a message, which, recommended by its own interesting import, is attested by signs, and wonders, and mighty works; that God is reconciling the world unto himself, and they must thankfully receive the message of reconciliation. The atonement of this Saviour is revealed as the only meritorious condition on which God, who has a right to prescribe what terms of pardon he pleases to his offending creatures, will vouchsafe to restore them to his favour; and on this atonement they must

supremely rely ; counting their best performances and their most brilliant virtues as wholly unavailing to obtain, on a claim of right, either the pardon of their sins or the glories of heaven. The grace of God's Holy Spirit is revealed as the powerful agent by which their corrupt nature is to be renewed, their unholy passions subdued, divine virtues implanted in their souls, and good works produced in their conduct ; and this grace, therefore, must be their supreme dependence ; its powerful succours they must seek to obtain by earnest prayer, and by the participation of the divine ordinances appointed to convey it ; working powerfully on their minds, and yet to be known only by its fruits, this divine spirit must be cherished as the only source of spiritual life ; and by co-operation with its gracious influences must they seek to be transformed by the renewing of their mind, and to be made perfect in every good word and work. A church is established, through which, as the body of Christ, communion is to be maintained with him, its divine head. In this church sacraments and ordinances are established as the channels of his mercy and grace ; officers set over this church, deriving their power from Christ, its divine head, dispense the word of his truth, and celebrate the means and pledges of his grace and mercy ; and unto this church all they to whom the Gospel is proclaimed must be added, if, according to God's ordinary and established method, they would be saved ; by hearing the word and participating of the ordinances duly preached and celebrated by the authorized ministry of this church, must they derive from its divine head spiritual strength and nourishment, until at length they are fitted to see him face to

face in the glories of the church triumphant. To them life and immortality are brought to light; darkness is dispelled from the grave by the divine Redeemer, who passed in glory through it; it is become the passage to seats of immortal bliss. As heirs of this heaven, Christians are called to live on earth as strangers and pilgrims; refreshed by the enjoyments of the world, but not setting their affections supremely upon them; and pressing forward through all discouragements, through all difficulties, through all temptations, to that home which is prepared for them, eternal in the heavens. Thus must they to whom the Gospel is proclaimed fear God, by humbly receiving the record which he has given them of his Son; thus must they work righteousness according to the precepts, the means, and the motives unfolded by that Saviour in whom they are commanded to believe. Vain will be their pretence of fearing God, while they reject him whom God has sent; vain will be their pretence of working righteousness, while they neglect that Gospel which affords the full rules, the spotless example, and the most powerful aids and motives to virtue. But while they fear God by receiving his blessed Son as their Saviour, and work righteousness, guided by the principles, strengthened by the aids, and animated by the motives there revealed, they will be accepted. No worldly circumstances will affect God's impartial judgment. Jew and Greek, Barbarian, Scythian, bond and free, are all invited to partake of the blessings of the Gospel; and the standard by which they shall be judged to be qualified for these blessings, is their fearing God and working righteousness. No unconditional decree, selecting certain individuals to everlasting

life, and reprobating others, disgraces the records of heaven, and transforms the sceptre of mercy into the tyrant's rod. God's will is that all men should be saved—he will judge them as their work shall be—he is no respecter of persons.

The *proof* of this important truth, which, in its application to those who are destitute of the light of the Gospel, and to those who enjoy it, has been thus exhibited, cannot be difficult.

To represent God as a respecter of persons, awarding his final favour to mankind by an arbitrary standard, or by a capricious and partial judgment, would equally violate his *attributes*, and be derogatory to his *character*.

It would violate his *attributes*—his justice, which renders to all their impartial due—his holiness, which regards with favour the righteous only—his goodness, which prompts him to bestow happiness on those only capable and worthy of enjoying it—and his truth, which is pledged to judge every man according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

To represent God as a respecter of persons, would also be derogatory to his *character*. He is the Father, the Sovereign, the Judge of his creatures.

An earthly parent would deserve opprobrium, who should regulate his favours to his children by any other standard than their respective deserts: let us not then attribute to the Parent of the universe what would be disgraceful in a human parent. An earthly sovereign, who should dispense his favours to his subjects, not according to their merits, but as caprice or power might dictate, would be deemed a tyrant; and shall we ascribe to God,

the Sovereign of the universe, what would be disgraceful in a human sovereign? We should deem an earthly judge deserving of the severest crimination, who, in his decisions, should be swayed by partiality, or by caprice, or by any other motives than those of impartial justice: and shall we impute to the righteous Judge of all, what would be dishonourable in a judge of a human tribunal? Father of our spirits! Sovereign of the universe! Judge of the earth! let us not then sink thee to a level with the most unworthy of our race. No! thou art no respecter of persons. They who fear thee and work righteousness, shall be accepted with thee.

The *inferences* from the truth now explained and established, are many and important.

The doctrine contained in the text removes the imputations which are sometimes cast upon them, from the inequality of his dispensations to mankind.

We behold a large portion of the human race destitute of the blessings of the Gospel: they have not heard a Saviour's name, nor have their ears rejoiced in the glad tidings of salvation through a Saviour's merits. Does this appear an imputation on the goodness and justice of the Governor of the universe? No; he is still good and just—he is still no respecter of persons: he has extended the merits, though not the name, of his blessed Son to all mankind, so as to make salvation possible to all those who fear him and work righteousness. And in applying this standard to the virtuous heathen, he will judge them according to what they have, and not according to what they have not. As of old, it is said that God “winked at,” excused

“those times of ignorance” when men deformed his worship by the rites of idolatry and superstition ; we may, therefore, reasonably conclude that he will not be strict to mark what is done amiss in those dark corners of the earth where the light of his Gospel has not shone, and where, of course, benighted man has no means of knowing, in the full lustre of his attributes, that one living and true God who must be worshipped in spirit and in truth. Nor will God reap where he has not sown—he will not exact from those who sit in darkness, who enjoy only the feeble intimations of his being, worship, and will, discoverable by the obscure lights of tradition, of reason, and of conscience, the same spiritual improvements which he will exact of those who are blessed with the full revelation of his glory in Jesus Christ ; and as the virtue of the heathen must necessarily be far inferior to that of the Christian, so, according to the rules of justice, will be his final reward. This is no imputation on God’s goodness ; he has a just right to do what he will with his own. In the exercise of this right he renders his intelligent creatures capable of different degrees of virtue and happiness. This is no infringement on his goodness, for he deals with them according to the improvement which they make of the advantage that they enjoy. The source of goodness, he diffuses felicity in various degrees through the countless orders of intelligent beings. He thus, powerfully illustrating his glory in the *variety* of his works, and yet making all his virtuous creatures happy in proportion to their various capacities, establishes his justice. Angels, pure and celestial spirits, are created capable of higher happiness than man ; and

even among celestial spirits, as among men, one star differeth from another star in glory. The seraph who bows in adoration near the throne, enjoys fuller communications of the divine glory than the ministering spirit who worships at a humbler distance. God then will accept, through the merits of his Son, those among the heathen who fear him and work righteousness, according to the means which they enjoy and the light which he vouchsafes them. They are destitute of many advantages which Christians enjoy, in being deprived of that Gospel which would dispel all their darkness, their doubts, and fears, and rendering them capable of higher virtue, would also render them capable of higher bliss ; and our exertions should be united with our prayers, that God's " way may be known upon earth, his saving health among all nations."* But to make salvation absolutely impossible to the heathen—to doom them to eternal perdition, because they have not believed in a Saviour who was never made known to them, is no doctrine of our church ; for, though she condemns those who assert that men may be saved according to the law which they profess, independently of the merits of Christ, yet, in declaring that he made an atonement for the sins of the whole world, both original and actual, she is of course led to maintain that God is no respecter of persons, but accepts, in every nation, those that fear him and work righteousness.

Another inference from this important truth is, that the guilt of those must be aggravated, and their punishment severe, who, where the Gospel is proclaimed, reject or neglect it.

* Psalm lxxii. 2.

Can they plead that, notwithstanding their neglect or rejection of the Gospel, they still fear God and work righteousness! What must be that *fear of God* which rejects the record that God has given of his Son; which ranks among the tricks of knavery, or the delusions of superstition, those mighty signs and wonders that attested the mission of the Son of God; which hesitates not to brand as an impostor him whom the Father hath glorified and sent into the world! What must be that *righteousness* which daringly violates the command of God to believe on his Son; which disclaims those exalted means of piety and virtue afforded in the revelation of Jesus Christ, and which, under the pretence of doing the will of God as obscurely intimated by the lights of reason and conscience, opposes that will clearly and forcibly proclaimed from heaven; teaching men to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live righteously, soberly, and godly in the world? Surely if justice be an attribute of the Governor of the universe, signal must be the punishment of those who contemn his authority, who reject his merciful counsel for their salvation, the rules of righteousness, the messages of peace, the glories of eternity! Even they who despised his law proclaimed by Moses, who was but his servant, perished; of how much sorer punishment shall they be thought worthy who trample under foot the Son of God, and count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing!

But, my Christian brethren, aggravated also will be our guilt, and severe our punishment, if, while we profess to believe in the revelation of the will of God contained in the Gospel, we do not fear him nor work righteousness.

The luminous pages of God's written word, delineating our duty and exciting us to perform it, lie open before us. The interesting truths, the holy laws, the powerful aids, the cheering promises, the awful threatenings of this word, are constantly promulgated to us. The ordinances of the church, enforcing holiness, dispensing grace, offering mercy, are administered before us. God calls us in the warnings of his providence and the strivings of his Holy Spirit: he calls us to receive his counsel, to hearken to his reproof. He, the Son of God, manifest in the flesh, who died to redeem us from the sorrows and sins of the world, invites us to follow him, to be like him holy, that with him we may be for ever happy. Heaven displays its glories—hell unfolds its terrors. If thus urged, invited, warned, we do not fear God and work righteousness, reason will brand our conduct with shame; conscience will fix on it the stain of the blackest ingratitude, folly, and guilt: and he whose name we have dishonoured, will finally, as the Judge of the world, seal our eternal condemnation. For assuredly a day is approaching, when, in the everlasting bliss assigned to the righteous, and the everlasting misery allotted to the wicked, the truth will be proclaimed with awful power—"God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation, they only who fear him and work righteousness, are accepted with him."

SERMON XI.

THE CALLED AND THE CHOSEN.

MATT. xxii. 14.

For many are called, but few are chosen.

THIS solemn admonition of our blessed Lord was delivered at the conclusion of a parable, in which, under the appropriate figure of a marriage feast, he set forth the blessings of the Gospel; the earnest calls of God to mankind to accept these blessings; the rejection of these calls by some, and the forfeiture by others, of the blessings promised. One had married a wife, another went to his farm, and another to his merchandise. The pleasures, or the cares, or the business of the world, induced many to reject the Gospel call. And many of those who regarded and accepted it, were not finally chosen, were not finally advanced to the participation of its eternal joys, because they wanted the wedding garment—that spiritual righteousness which is an indispensable qualification for the enjoyment of the holy presence of God in the kingdom of heaven.

Who are the called? And

Who are the chosen?

Are the inquiries which my text naturally leads us to consider.

In a general sense, all men are called to the service of God: they are all bound by the law of their nature to serve him who is the gracious

Author of their being: they owe him gratitude as their Preserver and Benefactor, who gives them richly all things to enjoy: they are all amenable to him as the omniscient and almighty Judge of the universe which he has made.

Thus bound to obey the Being who made, preserves, and blesses, and who is finally to judge them, it would be contrary to every idea which reason can form of his benevolence and justice, to suppose that he has left his reasonable and accountable creatures entirely ignorant of his glorious attributes, and of the service which they are required to render him. No; the word of God on this point harmonizes with the voice of reason. It represents the Almighty as the benevolent Father of the whole human race, and as accepting, in every nation, those who fear him and work righteousness, according to the measure of natural light or Gospel grace vouchsafed to them. "Jesus Christ" his eternal Son, who undertook the work of propitiating divine justice, offended by man's transgression, is held forth in that blessed Gospel which he promulgated, not only as "the Saviour of those who believe," but as "*the Saviour of all men.*" "Jesus Christ," says the apostle, "is the Saviour of all men, especially of them that believe."* Through the infinite efficacy of his merits, and influences of his grace, salvation is rendered possible to those who, though they never heard of his name, seek to obey, according to the measure of light which they have received, that supreme Lord who hath given them life, and breath, and all things. God, the gracious Father of mankind, calls them all to his fear and service.

* 1 Tim. iv. 10.

He calls them by that primeval revelation of his being, attributes, and will, which, though obscured by error and disfigured by superstition, has been extended throughout the earth, and handed down through all ages.

He calls them by the voice of nature, bearing testimony in all her works to the existence, the attributes, and will of that almighty Lord, the knowledge of whom universal tradition had thus preserved.

He calls them by the voice of conscience, the law written on the heart, prompting to good and restraining from evil.

He calls them by the monitions of his Spirit, exerting in their hearts its secret but powerful sway.

Thus does the gracious Father of mankind call them all to his fear and service. No nation, however enveloped in ignorance, or debased by superstition and vice, has totally extinguished the knowledge of a supreme Maker and Lord of all things. His being, attributes, and will, at first proclaimed by revelation, have been preserved by tradition, and confirmed by the voice of reason, of nature, and of conscience.

Even in the wilderness you behold the savage bowing in adoration before the great Spirit whom his fathers worshipped; who hath spread before him the extended forest; who rewards with success his labours in the chase; who preserves him through the summer's heat, and through the winter's cold; and who has provided for him, beyond the distant horizon that bounds his view, a country of rest and peace. Enter the temples embellished by the arts, and celebrated in the strains of pagan genius; in the incense that ascends from the censers of their

worshippers, in the blood of the victims immolated on their altars, you behold the marks of homage to the divinities who rule the destinies of men ; you hear the acknowledgment of guilt seeking to propitiate the offended justice of heaven ; you see efforts to secure the favour of that great Being who has prepared, they hope, a place of happiness for the virtuous, and they fear, a place of misery for the wicked. Yes—feeble as was the light that dawned through pagan darkness, it was yet a light which disclosed a portion of the attributes and will of the Lord of the universe ; which even darted some faint rays through the darkness of the tomb, and opened the obscure indeed, but cheering prospect of scenes of immortality and bliss.

When we contemplate the delineations of piety and virtue contained in the writings of some heathen moralists ; when our hearts glow with admiration at the exalted characters among them who sought to know and to serve the divine Author of their being, not alas ! with Christian faith and hope, but with Christian sincerity and zeal—we behold evidences of the truth declared in the volume of inspiration, that “ God never left himself without witness,” but by the voice of nature, of reason, of conscience, and of his secret spirit, *calls* all men to serve him, whose offspring they are, whose goodness made, and whose power protects them.

But, my brethren, feeble are the calls of natural reason, of traditional religion, of uncovenanted grace ; imperfect must be the degree of holiness which can be attained by the light and aids which they afford, and inferior the rewards that will be bestowed hereafter on the imperfect virtue which has not been cherished by the grace of the Gospel.

Cause then of the liveliest gratitude have they to whom that Gospel is proclaimed, that they are called by a voice more clear, more impressive, more awful, and yet more inviting—the voice of God in his *holy word*, in the *ministry*, and in the *sacraments* and *ordinances* of his church.

Compared with the full disclosures made in God's holy word of his attributes and will, with the awful denunciations there exhibited against vice, and the alluring invitations there urged to virtue, obscure indeed appears the light of reason, and feeble the remonstrances of natural conscience. This holy word calls us to render homage to the Father of our spirits, not with that sensual worship into which unenlightened reason degenerated, but in spirit and in truth. It calls us to the service, not of a being whose nature, character, and attributes are but faintly discovered by the lights of reason and tradition, but of that Jehovah who has proclaimed himself in majesty and power as the Maker, the Preserver, the Governor, and the Judge of the universe, glorious in holiness, inflexible in justice, and yet infinite in love. This holy word calls us to walk not in a path of duty on which reason casts but a glimmering light, but in the way of God's commandments, where every virtue is displayed in celestial radiance, and every duty exhibited in its full obligation, excellence, and rewards.

The Christian, depressed by the sense of guilt and infirmity, is not left to the feeble suggestions of nature; he is cheered by the divine voice which proclaims that there is a Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world; that there is a Saviour provided for him, infinite in compassion as mighty in power, who hath promised deliverance to the

captives, and rest to the heavy laden. No longer trembling at the unappeased justice of heaven; no longer held in awful suspense on the interesting question—how God can be just, and yet justify the sinner—he is called to believe in a Saviour who hath brought him near who was once afar off, and propitiating divine justice, sealed mercy on the throne of God. In the calls of God's holy word, the Christian, assailed by the temptations and overwhelmed by the sorrows of life, hears the divine voice of consolation—all things shall work together for your good. No longer, like the unenlightened heathen, fleeing with trembling hope to an invisible Protector, he casts himself, in the fulness of confidence on that God who has revealed himself an all-sufficient refuge, a very present help in time of trouble. Animated by the calls of God's holy word, the Christian dejected at the view of the shortness and uncertainty of life, (who is not often thus dejected?) and dismayed at the darkness of the tomb, (who is not thus dismayed?) exults in the assurance, that an inheritance among the saints in light awaits him, where this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal immortality. No longer do doubt and fear cloud the prospect of futurity. Life and immortality are brought to light. Heaven is opened to his view. He is the heir of its glories, destined to live for ever with God.

Thus called by God's holy word, Christians are also called by the ministry of God's holy church.

That sacred society into which Christians are formed, is ruled by officers divinely commissioned to call them to discharge the high duties imposed on them, and to rejoice in the celestial privileges to which they may lay claim. "To us," saith an

inspired apostle, "and to your successors, to the end of the world," said our blessed Lord, "is committed the ministry of reconciliation." And we beseech you, as ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, be ye reconciled unto God; walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called; set your affections on things above, and let your hearts be in heaven, where your treasure is. This is the inspiring call which the ministers of God's church proclaim to its members. With a humility and meekness founded on the conviction that the treasure committed to them is held in earthen vessels, and that the excellence of the power is in God alone, but with a dignity and firmness excited by the consideration that their commission is divine, that they are the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God; and with a zeal and solicitude cherished by the solemn conviction, that their ministry will prove the means either of life or of death to those whom they address, do the servants of the Most High call men to the service of the Being who made them, to believe in the Saviour who redeemed them, to the faithful discharge of every duty, to the renunciation of every sin, to the exercise of piety to God and love to man, to moderation in prosperity, to contentment in adversity, to forbearance under the injuries, to resignation under the sorrows of life, to careful government of the heart, to holy circumspection of conduct, to that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord, without which Christians will forfeit that heavenly inheritance to which they are called.

Powerfully also are Christians called by the sacraments and ordinances of the church.

These are external symbols, by an appeal to the senses impressing the necessity of the purification of the heart, and dependence on God for spiritual nourishment and strength. But these ordinances are thus not merely the natural means of spiritual instruction. Insignificant as they appear to the eye of sense, they are made by divine power the means of conveying to us those influences of the Holy Spirit by which our darkened understandings are enlightened, and our corrupt hearts renewed. In them the voice of the Most High is heard calling men to the participation of the most exalted privileges, and to the discharge of the most exalted duties. His paternal voice meets us at our first entrance into life. In the sacrament of baptism we are born, not as in our natural birth, into a world of sin and sorrow, but into a spiritual world of holiness and joy, the Zion of the Lord—that Zion which is refreshed by the mercy, and illumined by the grace of God. We are born not into a society of frail, sinful, and perishing mortals, but into the goodly fellowship of believers, whose weakness is made strong by the strength of the Almighty, whose sins are washed away by the blood of atonement, and whose portion is allotted in the resurrection of the just.

Called in baptism to inherit these exalted privileges, we are also called in this holy sacrament to live as children of God, as members of Christ, and as inheritors of the kingdom of heaven; to put off the old man, the corrupt nature with which we came into the world, and to put on the new man, that new and holy nature which our spiritual birth in baptism denotes and enforces; to die to sin, as in baptism we professed to do, and to rise again

with that Saviour, into whose death we were baptized to newness of life.

Nor does the gracious voice of our heavenly Father leave us at our entrance into his fold. It accompanies us through every stage of our Christian course, calling us to duty, conveying to us strength and consolation.

In the apostolic ordinance of the laying on of hands, we are called to renew the engagements of baptism; its solemn obligations are again impressed upon us, and spiritual strength and succour conveyed to defend us against the increasing trials of our Christian warfare. In the *worship* of the sanctuary, the truths, the duties, and the privileges of our Christian calling are impressed upon us; our faith in these truths is strengthened, our zeal to discharge these duties increased, and our lively desires excited for the privileges of our high vocation.

God calls us to his service by still more affecting symbols. He lays before us the bread and wine of the altar, the body of his beloved Son broken, and the blood of his beloved Son shed for our sins; and from the altar is heard the voice of earnest and affectionate invitation—Come, sinful mortals, eat of the bread of life, and drink of the waters of salvation—wash away your sins, adorn and strengthen your souls with celestial graces—celebrate the love of him who died for you—consecrate yourselves to him who bought you with his blood, and in the symbols of his death receive the pledges of life for ever.

The call of God is addressed to all men, especially to those to whom the Gospel is proclaimed; but who are the *chosen*?

Listen to the declaration of our blessed Lord—
“Many are called, but few are *chosen*.”

Alas! that the call of nature, of traditional religion, of reason, of conscience, of the Divine Spirit—that the call of God in his holy word, in the ministry, and sacraments, and ordinances of his church, urging men to the belief of truths divine and consolatory, to the practice of virtues celestial and exalted, to the participation of privileges spiritual and immortal, should be disregarded—alas! that “many are called, but few are chosen.”

Brethren, that few are chosen, must be referred solely to the fault of man. On the part of God, we have seen every thing has been done that even mercy, more than justice, could demand. God deals with men as free agents; his grace is given to all men to enable them to serve him: God calls, but men refuse to come; he stretches out his hand, but they do not regard; he offers them his counsel, but they will not have it, and his affectionate reproofs they despise. Disobedient to the call of their heavenly Father, they are not worthy of being ranked among his children, of being chosen to the participation of the glories of the heavenly inheritance.

The nations of the earth were called by the voice of nature, of reason, of conscience, to the service of that God, the knowledge of whom had been handed down from the beginning; yet knowing God, they worshipped him not as God, but changed his incorruptible image into an image of corruptible things. Having the law written on their hearts, they effaced its holy impressions, and sought only the will of the flesh, fulfilling the lusts thereof.

And now when God speaks to men, not by the feeble voice of nature, of reason, of conscience, of

traditional religion, but by the voice of his only-begotten and well beloved Son, there are those who reject his call; who crucify afresh, by their sins, the Son of God; who trample under foot his blood; who do despite unto his Spirit; and who, called to be children of the light and of the day, walk as the children of the night and of the darkness. There are they who, though called, are not, ought not to be chosen.

If those who, deprived of the full and clear voice of instruction in the word, the ministry, and the sacraments of the church, listen to his gracious voice speaking to them in the language of traditional religion, in his works, in his ways, in the monitions of conscience, in the secret suggestions of his blessed Spirit; if, obeying this celestial voice, they seek to serve the Maker in all things as far as they know his will, and to worship him as far as tradition and reason dictate an acceptable worship; if they supplicate, though with uncertain faith, the mercy of the Father of their spirits, and repose, though with wavering confidence, in the goodness of the Parent of the universe, and cherish, though with dubious hope, the prospect of immortality beyond this transitory existence; if they thus seek to serve the Being who made them, according to the measure of light and knowledge which they have received—he who is not a hard Master, reaping where he has not sown, will accept their imperfect but sincere homage, through the merits of him who gave himself a ransom for all—that Lamb of God, the efficacy of whose sacrifice extended through all ages, having been slain from the foundation of the world. And in that celestial house in which are many mansions, he will confer on them

degrees of glory suited to the degrees of virtue which they have attained.

The highest stations in the kingdom of heaven are reserved for those among professing Christians, the called, the elect of God, who shall finally be chosen by him as his everlasting inheritance.

Those who, called by the word of God, obey its holy dictates in denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and living righteously, soberly, and godly in the world—those who, called by the ministry of the church, accept the offer of reconciliation, believing from the heart unto righteousness in the Saviour proffered to them, and adorning his doctrine in all things—those who, called by the sacraments of the church, improve the grace there conferred, to the death of sin and to the life of righteousness, and seek to be holy as he who hath called them is holy; these are the *few* (alas! compared with the multitude of the finally rejected, the *few*;) whom the Judge of the whole earth shall choose before men and angels to be his people for ever; these are they whom he will advance to a kingdom that shall not be moved, on whom he will bestow an inheritance of glory that fadeth not away.

Ye then who enjoy the light and privileges of the Gospel, distinguished far above the rest of your fellow men is your spiritual condition. For though salvation is possible to those destitute of the external grace of the Gospel, they can attain it but through much uncertainty, through many perplexing doubts and fears. Deprived of the full knowledge of God revealed in the Gospel, and of the way of access to him through a Saviour; of the truths, the precepts, and the promises of his holy word; of the enlightening and sanctifying efficacy

of his grace in the sacraments and ordinances of his church, they cannot attain in this life that exalted degree of holiness, nor those spiritual consolations and hopes which may distinguish Christians. Nor hereafter will they be advanced to felicity as exalted as that which, through God's mercy and grace in Jesus Christ, will be awarded to those faithful Christians who have walked worthy of their holy vocation.

Ye then, Christians, are peculiarly the favoured of the Lord—in the highest sense his called, his elect. Distinguished are his grace and goodness to you, in thus translating you from the darkness and misery of your natural condition, into the light and comfort of his grace and favour.

But take heed lest, being called, ye fail finally of being chosen.

This momentous issue depends upon yourselves. God *calls* you—by his word, his ministry, his ordinances, he calls you. Sincere in his purposes of mercy, he enables you by his grace to obey his call. No secret will opposes his declared will, that all men should be saved. No decree of his power selects certain individuals to salvation, and excludes others; or determines the eternal destiny of the human race, independently of those deeds done in the body, by which he declares all men shall be judged. No; it was the eternal purpose of his mercy in his Son Jesus Christ, to render salvation possible for all men, and finally to choose or to reject them, according to the improvement which they shall have made of the talents and the grace given unto them.

Say not then, O man, that the ways of God are unequal. Lay not, sinner, thy destruction to him

who calls thee to salvation. But take heed, Christians, lest a promise being made you of entering into God's rest, you fall short—take heed lest, called to be heirs of heaven, ye forfeit its glories. It is possible that, at that great day when the Judge of all comes to choose among his called those who are to be his people for ever, you may behold Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, all those in every age and nation who fear God and work righteousness, in the kingdom of heaven; and *you*, for whom these blessings of this kingdom were primarily designed—*you*, the children of the kingdom, for ever cast out. Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure, “for many are called, but few are chosen.”

SERMON XII.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FIDELITY IN WARNING SINNERS.

ISAIAH lviii. 1.

Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.

THIS was the fearful injunction of God on the holy prophet. Ofttimes he was charged with the messages of mercy and the tidings of salvation. The vail that concealed future ages was removed; the light of Gospel-day beamed on the soul of the prophet; and he was commanded to proclaim to the chosen people of God, that the Sun of Righteousness should arise with healing under his wings. Ofttimes did his soul bound with joy at the grateful commission, to comfort disconsolate Judah and captive Jerusalem with the tidings that her iniquity was pardoned, that she should receive at the Lord's hand double for all her sins. In enraptured vision he beholds a messenger on the distant mountains hastening to proclaim to Judah and Jerusalem the advent of their Lord, and he bursts forth in the strains of joy and triumph—"O thou that tellest glad tidings to Zion, get thee up into the high mountain: O thou that tellest glad tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!"* Ofttimes did the prophet, personat-

* Isa. xl. 9.

ing the blessed Messiah, describe in joyful strains his gracious character and offices. "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."* Oft-times did the prophet, looking down the long tract of time, hail the dominion of the Prince of Peace, the accession of the nations to the spiritual kingdom of the Messiah, and the glorious and everlasting blessings of his reign. These were the exalted subjects that animated his strains when he proclaimed that "they should not hurt nor destroy in all the holy mountain of God;"† "that the righteousness of Jerusalem should go forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burneth;"‡ "that Gentiles should come to her light, and kings to the the brightness of her rising; that violence should no more be heard in her land, wasting nor destruction within her borders, but that she could call her walls Salvation, and her gates Praise. Her sun should no more go down, neither her moon withdraw itself, but the Lord should be her everlasting light, and the days of her mourning should be ended."§

But alas! the prophet was not always the messenger of glad tidings to Israel; for "their iniquities had separated between them and their God, and their sins have hid his face from them. Their thoughts were thoughts of iniquity, wasting and destruction were in their paths."|| Therefore

* Isa. lxi. 1, 2.

† Isa. xi. 9.

‡ Isa. lxii. 1.

§ Isa. lx. 3, 18, 20.

|| Isa. lix. 2, 7.

the holy prophet who had so often proclaimed the messages of mercy, was charged with the awful commission of judgment and of wrath.

“Cry aloud,” was the charge to him, “spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.” With plainness, with impartiality, with decision, with energy, show the rebellious people of Jehovah their transgression, the guilty house of Jacob their sins.

Like the holy prophet, the church has been occupied, in her preceding joyful festivals, in proclaiming to her members only the messages of glad tidings. She called upon us to prepare for the coming of the Lord of hosts to his temple, even that Messenger of the covenant whom we should delight in. Hitherto she has gladdened our hearts with the tidings of great joy, that “unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given;”* and that “he should be for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house.”† These have been the joyful subject of all her holy services.

But alas! he whose glorious character and offices she has thus triumphantly set forth, “has come unto his own, and his own have received him not.”‡ “Our iniquities have separated between us and our God, and hid his face from us, that he cannot hear.”§ Therefore doth the church change the songs of triumph for the lamentations of mourning, and the tidings of joy for the calls to contrition; and devoting this season to solemn reflection, hu-

* Isa. ix. 6.

† St. John i. 11.

‡ Isa. xlii. 6, 7.

§ Isa. lix. 2.

miliation, and penitence, she charges her ministers with the commission of the prophets—"Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins."

Yes, brethren, in obedience to the command of that God whose commission we bear, and of the church whose ministers we are, it is our duty to "show you your transgressions and your sins;" and in the discharge of this duty to "cry aloud, and spare not, to lift up our voice like a trumpet," to execute her commission with plainness, with fidelity, with energy, and with zeal.

1. The charge respects sinners of every description, not only those who have advanced to the last stage of confirmed impiety, openly denying the Lord who bought them; treating his divine mission as an imposture, the messages of his salvation as idle tales, and that judgment and eternity which he came to reveal, as only phantoms conjured up to impose on the credulous and alarm the timid. Not only those who, having for a long time sought only the gratifications of their sensual passions, have at length given themselves up to work all uncleanness with greediness, who riot without shame and without remorse in the scenes of intemperance and lewdness, and from whose lips proceed blasphemous imprecations of the God who made them, and of the Saviour who redeemed them. Not only those who, however they may abstain from those gross vices that would destroy their reputation, their property, and their health, are restrained by these considerations alone; and making the acquirement of gain, and the enjoyment of pleasure, their supreme aim, pursue these objects in the neglect and

violation of those sacred duties which bind them to their God, of that justice and charity which they owe to man, and of that sobriety and purity which they should cherish in their conduct and their hearts. Not only sinners of this prominent and marked character, but *they* also, who, whatever may be the comparative innocence of their lives, have not yet secured their Christian privileges, pledged to them in baptism, by fulfilling its sacred obligations, nor made their peace with God by unfeigned repentance and lively faith ; who, while they cultivate integrity, and justice, and kindness, in their intercourse with their fellow men, and abstain from the gross indulgences that would corrupt their own hearts, live in the habitual neglect of the service and homage which they owe to their Almighty Maker, Benefactor, and Saviour. To impenitent sinners, to unrenowned and unholy men of every description, the voice of God's judgment is directed —“ Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways, lest iniquity prove your ruin.”* Every violation of the laws of God which we commit, is preparing for us, if not in the present world remorse of conscience, assuredly in that which is to come, the worm that never dies, and the fire that never will be quenched. For every sinful gratification, for every profanation of the holy name of our God, for every violation of his laws, he will bring us into judgment. And does that awful event, which will bring us with all our sins and iniquities into the presence of the Almighty Sovereign and Judge of the world, and whose tremendous and eternal vengeance we have justly provoked, impress us with no terrors? My brethren,

* Ezek. xviii. 30.

we may be free from gross and enormous transgressions, and from any violations of the laws of justice, charity, and purity, but the sins of omission, as it regards the homage and obedience due to the Almighty Being who made and rules us, our merciful and gracious Protector and Father, the Fountain of all our blessings, the Author and Finisher of our redemption, will be charged upon us at the great day of account. Until we are reconciled unto God through repentance and faith in the merits of his Son Jesus Christ, and transformed by the renewing of our minds, walk in newness of life, we are in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity.

2. There are also *insincere professors of religion*, to whom this injunction of the prophet, to “cry aloud, and spare not, to show them their transgressions and their sins,” will apply.

The profession of religion is sometimes assumed from some motive of worldly reputation, interest, or advancement, under the cloak of sanctity, to deceive the world, while, in secret, unhallowed passions and sensual and selfish aims are pursued and gratified. There are some who, like the pharisee of old, “make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, while within they are full of extortion and excess.”* Against such as these did the Lord direct, by his prophet, the voice of judgment—“Cry aloud, spare not.” To the guilt of transgression against their Almighty Maker—of sinful passions cherished and indulged—they add the deeper guilt of attempting not only to deceive their fellow-men, but to impose upon the all-seeing God. But assuredly the period is approaching, when that

* Matt. xxiii. 25.

sovereign and just God, whom they are mocking and insulting by the pretences of piety and devotion, will come and assign them their just portion for ever in that place where there is only “weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth;” for “the hope of the hypocrite shall perish.”*

3. There are also *superficial* professors of religion, who are the just objects of this injunction of God to the prophet.

They who consider religion as consisting merely in decency of conduct, in an attendance one day in the week on public worship, and in professions of attachment to the cause of piety and virtue; who are punctual in observing the indispensable forms of religion, but are not attentive to the spiritual import and tendency of these institutions, nor diligent in making them instrumental to their growth in piety and virtue, and to their advancement in that “holiness, without which no man can see the Lord.”† They have not laid the foundation of their religion in that “renewing of the mind” by the Holy Spirit which their baptism denoted and enforced, and for which it pledged the necessary grace and the most powerful motives, and which alone can make us real, consistent Christians, and by assimilating us to the image of God in his purity and holiness, qualify us for the enjoyment of his presence. They are strangers to the quickening, transforming, invigorating power of faith as the principle of the Christian life, that faith which is “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,”‡ which constantly brings to our minds, as the objects of our supreme love, confi-

* Job viii. 13.

† Heb. xii. 14.

‡ Heb. xi. 1.

dence, desire, and pursuit, the glorious realities of a spiritual and eternal world—our gracious and all-powerful God and Saviour, his all-prevailing merits and grace, the perfection and the bliss of his heavenly kingdom. Satisfied with a certain routine of public observances, they neglect those no less indispensable private means of grace, those high sources of consolation in the Christian life—secret and fervent meditation and prayer. Ah! my brethren, how far short of the claims of the Gospel is this superficial piety! how inadequate to the righteous demands of our God and Saviour! how delusive as a preparation for heaven! All these considerations unite in demanding that we be transformed by the renewing of our minds; that we be sanctified in soul and body; that the lives which we live in the flesh, be lives of faith on the Son of God, in whom, though now we see him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory; and that, looking supremely, not at the things which are seen and temporal, but at the things which are not seen and eternal, we earnestly and constantly press for the mark of the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus. Let us not then deceive ourselves with a form of godliness while we are destitute of its power, nor draw near to God with our lips with an external, superficial service, while our hearts are far from him.

4. There are professing Christians of a *different description*, to whom the injunction of God to the prophet to “cry aloud, spare not,” should be directed.

They who place their religion in the *sallies of irregular zeal*, and not in the sober and uniform dispositions and virtues of the Christian spirit and

character, who, instead of being occupied with their own demerit and unworthiness, and with the humble publican, “ smiting their breast and saying, God be merciful to me a sinner,”* indulge the censorious spirit of the self-righteous pharisee, and in the elation of spiritual pride and arrogance, say to their brother, “ Stand off from me, for I am holier than thou :”† they who, while they are loud in their professions of ardent love to God and zeal for his glory, are unmindful of the command, that “ he who loveth God should love his brother also,”‡ and should uniformly display the virtues of humility, of mildness, of tenderness and benevolence. There are those who, in the fervours of an unhallowed enthusiasm, will neglect or undervalue the ministry and ordinances of Christ’s church, which God has made the means of his grace and the pledges of his mercy, and yet lay claim to extraordinary inspirations of his Spirit. But God has commanded us to walk blameless in all his statutes and ordinances : he has gathered us into a church, that thus, as members of the mystical body of his Son, we may be united in the exercise of a living faith to its divine Head. The fruits of the Spirit are not pride, arrogance, censoriousness ; but humility, meekness, love. It is the declaration of Christ—“ Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven ; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven.”§ Let us take heed therefore, if we are thus deceiving ourselves, lest, at the solemn day of account, the Almighty Saviour and Judge confound our boastful pretensions with the sentence

* Luke xviii. 13.

† Isa. lxxv. 5.

‡ 1 John iv. 21.

§ Matt. vii. 21.

of reprobation—"Depart from me, I know you not."

5. There are also professing Christians who *fall very far short* of the claims of their Christian calling.

Contented with low attainments in piety and virtue, with only such a measure of obedience as they think will save them from the penalties of the divine law, they are indifferent about attending to its highest demands, and fulfilling its sacred spirit. Aiming at the fruitless task of serving God and mammon, while they wish to rank themselves among the humble followers of Christ—for it is their wish to die the death of the righteous, and to have their last end with his—they are yet loth to relinquish the corrupting circles of sensual enjoyment. But it is the indispensable characteristic of Christians to aim at the highest standard of holiness—at being pure, as the holy Being whom we serve is pure—at being perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect; and not to "love the world, nor the things of the world: for if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."* And though this injunction cannot be intended to separate us from the indispensable duties and innocent enjoyments of life, it was surely designed to forbid all those indulgences that corrupt the purity of our hearts and weaken the fervours of our piety. We must then be prepared, in all these cases, to deny ourselves, to take up our cross and to follow the path of holy obedience and patience marked out by our crucified Lord, or we cannot be his disciples.

6. Even the *sincere followers of Christ* are the objects of the injunction—"Cry aloud, spare not,

* 1 John ii. 15.

show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins."

For how far short do they fall of that perfection in piety and goodness after which they should aspire! How warm is their attachment to earthly pursuits and pleasures, and how feeble their love for spiritual and eternal objects—for the truths that will save them from error, and sin, and death—for the objects that will make them happy to all eternity! How many secret imperfections alloy the virtues that shine fair unto the world! How often have they to lament the inconstancy of their pious resolutions, the feebleness of their holy desires, their susceptibility to the many allurements of a tempting world!

Yes, Christian brethren, sincere as is your devotion to your God, supreme as are your resolutions to serve him, you must bear testimony to the truth, that "there is no man that liveth and sinneth not." Let the reflection on your numerous frailties and imperfections teach you the deepest humility, and while it excites to increased watchfulness and circumspection, lead you to seek the powerful succours of that grace which only can keep you from falling. Let your prayers, your desires, your exertions in the great duties of your Christian calling, be sincere, and earnest, and constant; and then, whatever may be the frailties of your nature, you may take comfort in the assurance, that he who hath called you, is faithful as he is merciful, and will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able to bear, and to resist, and to overcome.

Finally, brethren, while the servants of the sanctuary are diligent and faithful in the execution of

that commission for which they must render an account—that commission which enjoins them to “cry aloud and spare not, to show the people their transgressions and their sins”—let each individual carefully examine his own heart and life, that he may humbly repent of the trespass which he hath committed, and of the sin in which he hath sinned.

This sincere, deep, and faithful examination of our spiritual character and state is a paramount duty at all times, essential to our advancement in the great work of our Christian calling—the putting off the sins of our corrupt nature, the putting on the graces of the new man in Christ Jesus. Yet wise is the institution of the church, which at this holy season calls us to more serious and frequent exercises of self-examination, meditation, and prayer, lest uninterrupted occupation with the scenes of the world should weaken the ardour or tarnish the purity of our spiritual affections, or confirm us in our indifference to the things that belong to our eternal peace.

Deep repentance, leading, through divine grace, to newness of life—faith unfeigned in the merits and power of the blessed Redeemer, working by love, and bringing forth the fruits of righteousness—are the indispensable conditions of salvation. “Turn then, turn then from your evil ways, lest iniquity prove your ruin.”* “As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but had rather that he should turn from his evil ways and live. Turn then, turn then; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?”† “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved.”‡ If the guilty children of men would listen to the affec-

* Ezek. xviii. 30.

† Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

‡ Acts xvi. 31.

tionate invitations of God their Saviour, and turning from their iniquities, would fulfil the purpose of their being, and devote themselves to the Lord their God in righteousness and holiness—if the professors of the Christian name would walk worthy of their holy vocation, adorning the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things—the ministers of the Most High would be absolved from the necessity of fulfilling the injunction, “Cry aloud, spare not—show my people their transgressions, and the house of Jacob their sins.” Theirs would then be the more delightful duty to fulfil the commission of peace and reconciliation, to proclaim the glad tidings of mercy and salvation. “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.”* “For the Lord will redeem Jacob, and will glorify himself in Israel.”† “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God.”‡ “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint.”§ “The redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”||

Even so, blessed Lord, hasten this glorious consummation of the felicity of thy people—if not in this world of sin, of sorrow, and of tears—in that new heaven and new earth, wherein dwelleth for ever the perfection of righteousness and the fulness of joy.

* Isa. xl. 1.

† Isa. xlv. 23.

‡ Isa. xli. 10.

§ Isa. xl. 31.

|| Isa. li. 11.

SERMON XIII.

SELF-EXAMINATION.

LAM. iii. 40.

Let us search and try our ways.

HE who, in the career of worldly business or pleasure, never pauses and reflects on the character of his actions, and the tendency of his course, would be regarded as guilty of great folly, and as seriously endangering his welfare. But considering man in his character as a spiritual, and his destiny as an immortal being, what shall we say of those who never pause and reflect whether they are acting worthy of their spiritual character, and making preparation for their immortal destiny. If to hazard our temporal prosperity, through want of reflection, be folly, what must that heedlessness be denominated, which puts in jeopardy the interests of eternity?

My brethren, we are candidates for an immortal existence—we are to live for ever in a state of happiness or misery—our destiny is to be decided at the tribunal of the Lord of the universe; but him, our Maker and our Judge, we have offended by our transgressions; the sentence of his just displeasure is proclaimed against us. “Let us search and try our ways, and turn again unto the Lord.”

This scrutiny into our spiritual character and condition is at all times necessary, either to rouse us from a state of sin, or to quicken our progress in the religious course on which we have entered. Considering, however, the propensity of mankind to neglect a duty which is hostile to worldly indulgence and sensual pursuits, wisely has the church set apart a period to be consecrated with more than ordinary solemnity to that work of religious examination, which must be the *commencement*, as it is essential to the *progress* of the spiritual life, and which ought particularly to mark the season preparatory to the commemoration of that event which brings most forcibly into view our guilt, and which affords the sure pledge of our pardon—the passion and death of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Urged then by the general obligation of the duty, and by its peculiar propriety during the holy season on which we have now entered, “let us search and try our ways.”

1. The first subject of inquiry should be—What is the supreme object of our desire and pursuit?

The world is the scene of our duty, as it is the source of many of our rational enjoyments. There is no one object which it presents, which, in a certain degree, and to a certain extent, may not be pursued by us without endangering our piety and virtue; and yet there is no one object which, in the excessive love and pursuit of it, will not be destructive of our piety and subversive of our eternal interests.

Here then arises an important inquiry—Does the world occupy such a place in our affections and exertions as to exclude an attention to our

spiritual concerns, or to lead us to make them inferior objects of desire and pursuit? The inquiry is one on which we should enter without delay, and which we should prosecute with solicitude and fidelity: for if we are so devoted to our temporal interests as to neglect the concerns of our salvation, what will be our condition when we are summoned from that world with which we are engrossed, and have entered on that eternity for whose awful scenes we are unprepared?

It is an inquiry, then, of infinite moment; but if faithfully prosecuted, it is not difficult of solution. Is it your supreme desire and endeavour so to pass through things temporal, that you lose not the things that are eternal? In order to gain these, and to save your souls, are your principles, your duties, and your hopes, as Christians, faithfully cherished and regarded? And is every worldly object pursued and enjoyed in subordination to the infinitely higher objects of a spiritual and immortal life? Whatever temporal advantages you may possess—of treasure, of talents, or of station—are they all employed and all enjoyed as the means of aiding you in the attainment of those true joys of your heavenly inheritance where your hearts are fixed?

Brethren, let us examine ourselves in reference to this all-important subject. What is the object of our supreme desire and pursuit—the favour of God, or the joys of the world—the things of time, or the concerns of eternity? If you should find that the world supremely engrosses you—that your thoughts, your time, your talents, your exertions, all are occupied with the means of your temporal advancement, and with the enjoyment of your worldly

advantages—or if your attention to the pursuits of the world, or your indulgence in any of its enjoyments, weakens your pious feelings, diminishes your relish for the exercises of religion, and retards your progress in the spiritual life—then, rest assured, your salvation is endangered. If death should find you thus devoted and thus engrossed—and death, remember, may come when least expected—he will summon you to an account which you are wholly unprepared to render—he will hurry you to that eternity whose joys you have neglected for the transitory gratifications of the world, and whose terrors therefore you must sustain. Lose no time, therefore; search and try your ways; and from the service of a sinful and perishing world, turn to the service of the living God.

2. Another serious object of scrutiny and inquiry should be—Whether we entertain correct views of our spiritual condition.

Numerous are the causes which conspire to conceal from us our real spiritual character. The powers of the human mind capable of attaining such exalted heights of science, and of accomplishing such stupendous plans of civil polity; and of directing and ruling the strength and passions of the multitude to the objects of glory and ambition, tend to cherish the sentiments of arrogance and pride, so natural to the human heart; and while wealth or honour, that appears to be the fruit of our plans and exertions, elevates us in our own estimation, and gives us consequence and influence among those around us, it is not easy to admit any views of our character and state but those which flatter our vanity and self-love. The pride indeed

of the human heart—a passion not confined to the ranks of the rich and the mighty, but operating with equal force, though in a different manner, in all states and circumstances of mankind—reluctantly admits the conclusion that we are fallen beings, obnoxious to divine justice on account of our sins, and incapable of rescuing ourselves from the bondage of corruption.

And yet this is our real state and character. “The carnal mind,” says an inspired apostle, the mind of the flesh, misdirected or carried to excess, “is enmity against God;”^{*} and “there is no man that liveth and sinneth not.”[†] “We have all gone out of the way;”[‡] and “our sufficiency” for the work of our salvation “is of God alone.”[§] Are we sensible of these important truths? Do we so realize them as to make them the principles of our conduct? Under the deep impression of their importance, are we led to humble ourselves before God, “meekly acknowledging our vileness,” and imploring him to “make haste and help us?” Let us search and try whether these are the views of our spiritual character; for until we are sensible of our guilty and sinful state, we shall not apply for the means of deliverance. It is a maxim of common sense—“The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.”^{||} Christ “came not to call the righteous,” (those who think themselves so,) “but sinners to repentance.”[¶] The conviction that the disease of sin infects us, will alone lead us to seek for the remedies that are to be found in the mercy and grace of a compassionate and Almighty Redeemer; and not until we feel the

* Rom. viii. 7.

† Psalm lxxxix. 48.

‡ Rom. iii. 12.

§ 2 Cor. iii. 5.

|| Matt. ix. 12.

¶ Matt. ix. 13.

burden of sin, will we arise at the call of our merciful Lord, and "weary and heavy laden," go to him to receive "rest."

3. "Let us search and try our ways," bringing to our recollection and humbly confessing the sins which have marked our lives.

The confession of our sins is necessary to pardon. "He that covereth his sins" (is an inspired declaration) "shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy."* The more minutely we bring them to our recollection, and view them under all those circumstances which may have increased their guilt, the more deep and lively will be that contrition with which, on account of them, we shall humble ourselves before God, and the more clear and consolatory will be our hopes of pardon, and the more diligent and watchful shall we be, lest the same transgressions hereafter defile our consciences. A faithful scrutiny into our hearts and lives, and the humble acknowledgment and confession of our offences, though in some degree painful exercises, bring relief to the conscience, ease the soul of the burden of her guilt, and refresh her with the sense of the divine mercy.

In this scrutiny, then, into our character and lives, let us seriously and immediately engage. "Know thyself" was the maxim which heathen philosophy consecrated. In reference to our moral and spiritual condition, this knowledge is the most important which we can obtain. There will be no confession of faults until they are discerned, and no reformation or improvement until our deficiencies

* Prov. xxviii. 13.

are felt. In the sight of God there can be no true penitence which is not founded on a sense of our transgressions against him, and which is not accompanied with the acknowledgment of them in prayers for his mercy.

And until this mercy is exercised upon us, brethren, we are in a state of condemnation, exposed to the justice of that holy and Almighty Being who hath denounced indignation and wrath against every soul of man that doeth evil.

Let us then "search and try our ways;" let us bring to view, as far as possible, all our omissions of duty, all our violations of the laws of our God. Let us conduct this scrutiny as in the presence of Him that searcheth the hearts and trieth the reins of the children of men, and who cannot be deceived, and who will not be mocked. It is in vain to attempt to hide from him the transgressions which privacy and retirement may have concealed from the view of men. Who indeed can fully understand his errors? Who can detect his secret faults? Who can bring to remembrance all the transgressions which may have marked his life? Search then thou, O God, and try the ground of our hearts; prove us, and examine our ways: and when we come unto thee confessing our manifold iniquities, look upon us, we beseech thee, after the multitude of thy mercies, and blot out our sins.

4. But, my brethren, another subject of our faithful scrutiny should be—Whether it is our constant desire and endeavour to be renewed in the spirit of our minds, and to become holy in heart and life.

This is the great end, and this is the only evi-

dence of genuine repentance. The most humble expressions of our unworthiness, and the lowest humiliation under a sense of our transgressions, can be of no avail in the sight of God, except as they are an evidence of that deep detestation of sin which engages us in the sincere and diligent renunciation of it, and in the pursuit of that universal holiness which, by conforming us to his image, can alone prepare us for the enjoyment of the favour of God.

In this respect, then, “let us search and try our ways:” let us compare the dispositions of our hearts and the habits of our lives, our daily character and conduct, with the standard of holiness prescribed by the Gospel. Every disposition which is at variance with the Christian temper, it should be our constant endeavour, through divine grace, to subdue—every habit, contrary to the purity of the Christian character, to renounce—and every practice forbidden by the divine law, and inconsistent with our Christian profession, utterly to forsake.

My brethren, are we thus diligently engaged in the great business of our Christian calling—mortifying and correcting our evil tempers, and, through the renewing of the Holy Spirit, conforming our hearts and lives to the requisitions of the laws of God? It is not sufficient that we have embraced the Christian profession: it is not sufficient that, in the sense of our unworthiness, we have humbled ourselves before God, and cherish a lively dependence on his mercy through a Redeemer: it is not sufficient that we diligently attend on the means of grace. These exercises and acts are designed only as instruments of our renovation, by which we may be enabled to put off the body of sin to which we

are subject, and to “put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness;”* and unless they are thus employed by us, they are neither acceptable to God, nor of any avail to our salvation. All our religious professions, and all our religious exercises, must be brought to this test—Whether they have effected a holy change in our hearts, and engaged us in the constant renunciation of all sinful dispositions and practices, and the faithful discharge of all our Christian duties.

Let us search then and try, brethren, whether our religious exercises and professions will stand this test. Is it our supreme desire, our fervent prayer, our constant endeavour, to obtain the victory over every sinful passion, to renounce entirely every thing that is evil, and to be holy in heart and life, conformed to the image and obedient in all things to the will of our heavenly Master? Does the imperfect progress which we make in obtaining the victory over sin, and in the exalted graces and duties of the spiritual life, while it humbles us before God in the acknowledgment of our weakness and in supplication for his succour, excite us to more circumspection, more diligence, more watchfulness, more zeal in the great work of our Christian calling?

My brethren, the Christian life is not a life of indolence. It does not admit of the wilful indulgence of any sinful passion. It is not compatible with the habitual practice of any sin. Heaven is the glorious prize for which the Christian is to contend; and heaven, infinitely rich, and full, and exalted in its rewards, will not be awarded but to

* Eph. iv. 24.

those who, in their conquest, by divine grace, of their sinful passions, and in the attainment of the Christian virtues, are born of God, and thus made meet for the enjoyment of his celestial glories.

5. With this general inquiry as to our progress in the renunciation of sin, and in the attainment of the Christian graces, ought to be connected a *scrutiny* as to the *particular sin* to which we may be the most prone, or the *Christian virtue* in which we may be the most deficient.

This scrutiny is essential to our obtaining the mastery over that sin to which we are most prone, and to the full attainment of the virtue in which we may be most deficient: and *wilful* devotion to any sin, and *voluntary* deficiency in any Christian grace, will disqualify us for the kingdom of God. Here then is a most important scrutiny, and demanding peculiar fidelity and perseverance; for self-love will be apt to conceal from us the sinful passion to which we are the most addicted, or the deficiency in any spiritual grace which most strongly marks us. Let us search and try, then, where is our weakness, and where is our deficiency. We may abstain from one sinful passion, and indulge in another: we may shun one vice, and rush into its opposite. We may cherish, for example, purity, and yet indulge revenge; and may avoid extravagance, and yet be enslaved by covetousness. We may distribute our wealth in those channels where it will be least wanted, but where it will advance our reputation—some civil and temporal project—and withhold it where it will do the most good, but the least redound to our credit—plans for advancing the spiritual happiness of our fellow-

men. We may avoid all excess in worldly pleasure, and yet indulge a morose, unsocial, and censorious temper. We may humble ourselves before God in the most profound expressions of our unworthiness, and yet display towards our fellow-men a proud, domineering, and tyrannical spirit. We may inveigh against worldly pride and ostentation, and yet we may delight in the incense of spiritual flattery. In all these respects we may deceive ourselves—we may even deceive the world. But let us remember, we cannot deceive our God. He will search and prove us. And that we may escape his condemning scrutiny, let us search and try ourselves: let us, in the spirit of humility and prayer, faithfully examine our hearts and conduct; and whatever sinful passion we may have most frequently indulged, let that be the object of our most jealous caution; to whatever evil temper we may be the most prone, against this let us most sedulously guard; and in whatever Christian grace we may have been the most deficient, this let us cherish and pursue with increased ardour and zeal.

6. Let us search and try ourselves as to our attendance on those *means of grace* which are essential to our progress in the spiritual life.

Are we constant in our intercourse with heaven, by supplications and praises in private and in our families? Are we uniform in our attendance on the public worship of God, not only as a reluctant offering once on the day devoted to him, but in the regular afternoon as well as morning service of the sanctuary? Is our behaviour in his courts characterized by reverence, attention, and devotion? Do the prayers and praises by which we hold commu-

nion with our God, occupy the chief place in our estimation? and hence do we, as we have opportunity, worship God in his sanctuary, on the weekly days of supplication and praise? Admitted into covenant with him by the sacrament of baptism, and having ratified our baptismal engagements in the apostolic ordinance appointed for the purpose, do we continue in the unity of the church by communion with its authorized ministry, and show forth the death of our Lord, commemorate his love towards us, and secure our title to his mercy and grace, in the holy feast of the supper? When we behold the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ symbolically given and shed for us sinners, are our hearts humbled in contrition; and in the impulses of holy gratitude and love, do we offer ourselves, our souls and bodies, a *spiritual* sacrifice to him who was sacrificed for us?

These, brethren, are most important inquiries: for with the means and ordinances which he hath prescribed—and who shall say unto him, Why dost thou this?—it hath pleased God to connect his mercy and grace: and if the means and pledges of these gifts are neglected, or unworthily received by us, we cannot enjoy the gifts which they convey.

7. Lastly. It should be the subject of our most solicitous inquiry—Whether our hopes of salvation are founded only on the merits and grace of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

“There is salvation in no other. There is no other name by which we can be saved.”* This is

* Acts iv. 12.

the decree of the Being who made us, of the Almighty Sovereign who rules us, and of the eternal Judge whom we have offended, and at whose tribunal we are to receive our doom. Unremitted and faithful as we may and ought to be in struggling with our evil habits, in resisting temptation, and in renouncing every sinful practice; diligent and constant as we ought to be in the use of the means of grace, in adding to our "faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity;"* yet we must renounce all dependence on our own righteousness as the meritorious cause, and on our own strength as the effectual mean, of our salvation; and acknowledge, that through the mercy of God, and by the merits and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *only*, are we justified, sanctified, and saved. We are, at the best, but unprofitable servants. Heaven, in its rewards, is as far above our merits as the attainment of it is above our unassisted strength. "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name" be the glory and the praise.

My brethren, as sinners, we are all obnoxious to divine justice; and our only way of escape, is to turn from our iniquities to the service of the living God. We know these truths; we know also that it is of infinite moment that we act upon them. Why then do we delay? Death may find us thus delaying—(how many has it found thus delaying?)—and then eternity will receive us unprepared. In that eternity there is no pardon, no mercy, no

* 2 Pet. i. 5—7.

grace. “*Now* is the accepted time, *now* is the day of salvation.”* Pardon, mercy, grace, are now offered to us : *now* then let us secure them. “ Let us return unto the Lord, and he will be gracious unto us, and to our God, and he will abundantly pardon us.”†

* 2 Cor. vi. 2.

† Isa. lv. 7.

SERMON XIV.

THE DELAYS OF REPENTANCE.

ACTS xxiv. 25.

Go thy way for this time ; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.

DELAY is the fatal rock on which thousands make shipwreck of their everlasting hopes. Infatuated man is active, diligent, anxious in every concern but the one which, from its infinite and everlasting importance, should engross his most vigorous and supreme attention. Mark his conduct in the management of his worldly concerns, and in the pursuit of the objects of wealth, of honour, or of pleasure. You would suppose that these objects were most important and dignified in their nature ; that they were unalloyed and exalted in the enjoyment which they afforded ; and that, placed above the changes of time, they survived its exterminating ravages. Little would you think that these objects are often worthless and degrading in their nature, and that the highest gratification which they afford is transitory and unsatisfying. Mark, on the contrary, the reluctance which men discover seriously to attend to their spiritual interests, the difficulty with which they are awakened to a sense of the importance and value of religion and virtue, and the readiness with which they permit the most trifling objects to displace from their thoughts and atten-

tion the concerns of their souls. You would suppose that these concerns were designed to occupy only a small share of their thoughts, and that they are to be secured by some slight and superficial exertions. Little would you think that they involve every thing dear to our present and our future and eternal peace, and require the vigorous exertion of all our powers, the devoted attention of our lives.

Sometimes, indeed, conscience, touched by the secret energies of divine grace, or awakened by some alarming or afflictive dispensation of divine Providence, will set before the careless and thoughtless sinner, in just and awful colours, his danger and his guilt, his obligations to the Almighty Author of his being and of all his mercies, and the infinite importance of securing the salvation of his soul. Alas! enchained to sensual objects, and devoted to the gratification of his passions, he dismisses the holy considerations which conscience awakens in his soul, with the same pretext with which Felix, the Roman governor, trembling under the powerful reasoning of St. Paul, dismissed the unpleasant monitor—"Go thy way for this time; when I have a more convenient season, I will send for thee." Yes—men delay to a future, and as they fondly hope, more convenient season, an attention to their interests, to the salvation of their souls.

But consider the *guilt* in which, by this delay, they involve themselves, and the dangerous *folly* of their conduct.

Consider the *guilt* of this delay.

Conscience admonishes us, and reason confirms the alarming conviction, that we are exposed, by the violations of the laws of our Maker and our Judge, by our numerous and aggravated transgres-

sions, to his just and tremendous displeasure ; and yet, sinners as we are, guilty and condemned, we are offered, by the very Maker and Judge against whom we have rebelled, a glorious and everlasting salvation. Ineffable and surpassing in his forbearance and mercy, he presses us to attend to our everlasting interests as a concern of supreme importance, and invites us to accept, through the merits of that eternal Son whom he gave, and who offered himself for our redemption, the full remission of the guilt which, by our transgressions against him, we had incurred. And he urges and enforces his invitations by the most exalted promises, and the most fearful denunciations. And under these astonishing displays of mercy on the part of our Almighty Sovereign, what is frequently, may I not say generally, our conduct ? Urged by the solicitations of the world, yielding to the impulses of our sensual passions, we postpone our attention to the concerns of our souls, and neglect (strange and awful infatuation !) the overtures of mercy from our Redeemer and God. Oh ! let us pause and reflect on the aggravated guilt which by this conduct we incur. Every day that we delay our return to God adds new sins to the former catalogue, and increases the guilt of our impenitence and rebellion. We delay our repentance, as if we could with impunity indulge in forgetfulness of God and neglect of the offers of salvation which he graciously extends to us. But the least consideration will convince us that, by thus despising his forbearance, we are increasing the load of our guilt, and treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of his righteous judgment. The mercy which, by thus postponing an attention

to the concerns of salvation, we condemn, is the mercy of that Saviour who willingly and cheerfully gave himself for us. Would not gratitude dictate an immediate, a cheerful, a complete devotion of ourselves to the benignant Redeemer who thus undertook the dismaying work of our redemption? What greater insensibility and ingratitude can be evinced, than when we delay our acceptance of the blessings which he urges upon us—the complete remission of our sins, the enlivening joys of his favour, and the everlasting bliss of his heavenly kingdom? Every noble, tender, and generous feeling dictates our *immediate* entrance on that course of holy obedience and devotion to our God, whereby only we can testify our sensibility to his exalted love, and secure our present and everlasting felicity.

We postpone our return to God until some more convenient season—that is, until we have accomplished every scheme of worldly emolument and ambition which we have formed, and until we have gratified to the full the sensual propensities which now solicit indulgence. Then, when we can no longer serve the world, we will serve our God: then, when our passions are cloyed, when our desires refuse any longer to be awakened at the call of ambition and pleasure, we will devote the languid and expiring emotions of our souls to him who most justly demands their most pure and noble fervours. What conduct more dishonourable as it regards ourselves—more insulting in respect to God! Will he not in just judgment execute upon us the fearful sentence of his wrath—“Because I have called and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set

at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity: I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you.”*

Men delay to a *future*, and as they fondly hope, more *convenient* season, an attention to their eternal concerns.

Consider the *folly* of this conduct.

We delay to some future season a concern which, as it is of infinite importance, should be immediately secured; and we delay, under the alarming uncertainty whether any time more favourable for an attention to it than the present will occur. These are the two considerations which establish the folly of our conduct.

We delay to some future season a concern which, as it is of infinite importance, ought to be immediately secured.

What will we put in comparison with that exalted salvation which God presses on our immediate acceptance? What will we put in the balance against those everlasting interests which we are called to secure? The salvation offered to us by an infinitely merciful and gracious God, contains blessings of transcendent value, calculated to purify and exalt our natures; commensurate with our most noble and lofty desires; pure and enduring as that infinite fountain of being from whom they proceed. A salvation which confers on men the enlivening favour of their reconciled God; which redeems the heart from all degrading and corrupting passions; which implants in the soul those divine and celes-

* Prov. i. 24—27.

zual virtues that confer unfailing and everlasting peace—one would suppose, would awaken their most eager and solicitous desires, and engross their immediate exertions. And yet they postpone an attention to this divine and exalted salvation; they delay until some future season the pursuit of these inestimable blessings. And how are we to account for this criminal infatuation? What are the objects which, displacing these infinitely important concerns from our minds, engage our undivided pursuit? Are they objects of more value? Are they even of equal importance? Oh! let us not impiously insult the grace and mercy of God; let us not degrade the joys of his favour, the inestimable blessings of his salvation, by bringing them for a moment into comparison with those vain and perishing gratifications which, alas! we often place supreme in our affections and our pursuit.

Men delay the securing the interests of their immortal souls. Does some more important and valuable object engage their attention? Alas! “what will it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”* Will that world, whose honours, emoluments, and pleasures men prefer before the peace, the celestial purity, the divine perfection of their souls, rescue them from those pangs of an agitated and guilty spirit, by which God in righteous judgments here vindicates his authority; or save them from those infinitely more intolerable and those endless torments to which, if the voice of conscience be not deceptive, and the word of God be not false, they will be consigned at the day of retribution? At that “day”—

* Mark viii. 36.

the day characterized as the day of the fierce anger of Jehovah, when the heavens depart away as a scroll, when the elements melt with fervent heat, when the earth and all it contains shall be burnt up—will the recollection of those sensual pleasures and pursuits, from which they are for ever separated, sustain their trembling spirits in the midst of a departing world—in the throng of the assembled myriads of mankind—in the view of the book opened to proclaim all their iniquities—before the Judge, about to decide, with the voice of inexorable justice, their eternal doom? Alas! the objects of their sensual desire and pursuit, while they deluded them with the phantoms of enjoyment, and persuaded them to condemn substantial bliss, were nourishing the worm that never dies, and kindling the fire that never will be quenched: and, infatuated mortals! they find that they have bartered celestial joys for that worm that never dies—that they have exchanged celestial pleasures for that fire that never will be quenched.

But perhaps they who thus delay an attention to the things that belong to their eternal peace, would arrest the imputation of gross folly which this conduct fixes upon them, by the plea that they admit the immense importance of salvation, and the infinite value of the soul; and that they intend to devote to their spiritual and immortal interests all the attention which is necessary to secure them: they only delay this business to a more convenient season. And do they then hold in their hands the course of events, so that they can command a season more favourable than the present for the care of their souls and the securing of their immortal interests? Will the splendour of wealth at any

future period cease to dazzle? Will the charms of pleasure, to which they are now devoted, cease to entice? Will the heights of honour, at any future period, cease to inflame their imaginations and awaken their ambition? Alas! every day, by adding new force to their passions, places new obstacles in the path of piety and virtue: every indulgence of sinful passion rivets more closely its chains. Sensual desires and emotions, long indulged, become so deeply and intimately incorporated with the soul, that it is almost as difficult to renounce them, as for the Ethiopian to change his skin and the leopard his spots. With these considerations, then, forcing themselves upon us, will we cherish the absurd, may I not say, the insane hope, that at some future period the world will present to us fewer charms, and our passions diminished strength?

Admit for a moment the reasonableness of these expectations. What is the business before us? Is it one of easy, of mere human achievement? Look at the work to which we are called; no less than that of renovating corrupt nature, of crucifying the body of sin. How closely and firmly riveted to the heart are the passions and indulgences which must be renounced! How holy and exalted the virtues which must be acquired! How universal and strict the acts of obedience which must be performed! How many temptations will assail our hearts, weak, and disposed to yield to them! Let us bring home to our minds these considerations, and we shall be satisfied that, in the business of salvation, we shall need support and strength incalculably beyond those which our own powers will afford. And are we sure that, at any future period, the omnipotent

Being whose merciful forbearance we now disregard, and whose mercy and grace have been so long resisted, will afford us those divine succours, without which we can do nothing, without whose co-operating energy our own resolutions will be ineffectual? Hath not the sacred voice of his justice declared, that his Spirit shall not always strive with the disobedient and impenitent? that he who, being often reprov'd, hardeneth his heart, shall be utterly destroyed, and that without remedy? Salvation is promised to the *present* season; the mercy and grace of God are awarded to the faithful only in improvement of *present* privileges. "*Now* is the accepted time, *now* is the day of salvation."* "*To-day*, if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts."†

Those who neglect the great business of salvation are indeed seldom totally indifferent to its infinite importance. They hope to enter upon it in earnest at some future season. At present it is postponed; because the pressure of business, and the prosecution of their favourite plans and pleasures, render it difficult to attend to it. And have they then ascertained the precise period to which the merciful forbearance of God will extend the term of their probation? While they are employing the time which he allots them for the momentous purpose of securing their eternal interests, in frivolous or criminal pursuits or pleasures, or in those which respect only the present short period of their existence, what presumption to cherish the hope that the great and Almighty Being whose grace and mercy they are thus neglecting and contemning, will extend the term of

* 2 Cor. vi. 2.

† Heb. iv. 7.

their probation to the precise season (if that season is likely to come) when, having accomplished all their worldly plans, and gratified all their sensual desires, they will begin to think in earnest of serving him to whom their best days, their whole life, should have been devoted! Wouldst thou, O man, thus sport with a fellow-mortal in whose power thou wast placed? and wilt thou thus mock the eternal God?

Even they who profess to be the servants of the Lord, and to make things eternal the supreme objects of their attention, often postpone to a more convenient season the necessary work of relinquishing some indulgence, of controlling or subduing some passions, of moderating some worldly desire or pursuit, which they are sensible alloy the purity of their virtue, and thus endanger their salvation. Alas! my brethren, in all spiritual matters—(different is our course in worldly concerns)—but in all spiritual matters, the *future* and not the *present* seems to be the convenient season. Thoughtless that we are! Have we then secured ourselves against those numerous casualties, those formidable foes, that so often defeat the projects of man, and bring down to the dust his towering strength? While every day witnesses some of our fellow-mortals suddenly cut off from the prosperous scenes of life; while the spoiler throws his deadly shafts among the companies of the young, coursing gayly in the circle of pleasure—among those who, in the fulness and the ardour of mature strength, are thronging the paths of worldly aggrandizement and ambition—as well as among the ranks of those who, tottering under the infirmities of age, must soon let go their feeble hold on life; while, perhaps,

from our very side, a friend, a relative is summoned to his dread account—sinks unwarned into the tomb; will we coolly calculate on length of days? will we postpone to some future period a preparation for that eternity on whose brink we are standing? How infatuated are we! to presume still longer on the forbearance of that God whose mercy we are contemning, and to delay securing the interests of that immortal soul which perhaps this night his indignant justice may require of us!

Yet a little while, heavenly Father, forbear to execute upon us the just sentence of thy wrath; and, in mercy, awaken us to an immediate and serious attention to the things that belong to our eternal peace, ere they be for ever hidden from our eyes—ere we sleep that last sleep, the sleep of death!

SERMON XV.

DEATH-BED REPENTANCE.

MATT. XXV. 10.

And the door was shut.

THE church at this holy season calls with more than usual frequency and solemnity to repentance. Her faithful members she exhorts to more than customary acts of humiliation and self-denial, and to a particular acknowledgment at the throne of God, of those infirmities, and imperfections, and sins, from which the best in this probationary state are not exempt: for “there is no man that liveth and sinneth not.”

She also feels a deep solicitude that her solemn calls may awaken those who have hitherto slumbered secure in their iniquities; who, liable to the just wrath of an offended God, with fatal indifference cry to their conscience, Peace! and though on the brink of the abyss of perdition, are sporting in their sins.

Alas! her calls are seldom availing: often they do not even penetrate the hardened heart: and more frequently the compunction, the apprehension, the good resolutions which they excite, are dissipated by the soothing solicitations of present pleasure; and sinners delay—yes, they delay the work of repentance to a season more convenient;

like the foolish virgins in the parable, they delay, even until the last hour, preparing for the coming of their Lord—delay, expecting that then they may enter into his kingdom. Alas! “the door is shut!”

This delusion is most dangerous; and it is as common as it is dangerous. Few indeed are the individuals who are so hardened in their sins, and so indifferent to their God, to judgment, to the concerns of an eternal world, as to dismiss these awful subjects entirely from their thought: still fewer is the number of those who encourage the expectation, as impious as it is absurd, that without repentance they can be the objects of the favour of God, or be qualified for his presence. But when is this work of repentance to be performed?—to what period do they assign it?—to the last stage of life—to the bed of death? Yes—a death-bed repentance has been the dependence, the fatal dependence of thousands; it has deceived them, to their eternal destruction. They have been compelled, at the hour of midnight, at the hour of death, when they should have been ready to obey the summons of their Lord, to repair their past negligence; and alas! before they are ready to enter into his kingdom, “the door is shut!”

Let me then dissuade you from trusting to a death-bed repentance.

A death-bed repentance is a most dangerous dependence:

It is barely possible:

It is eminently difficult:

It is most hazardous:

It is only in part effectual as it respects its future reward.

1. A death-bed repentance is barely possible.

No limits indeed can be set to that mercy of God which willeth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should repent and live; and which prompted God not to spare his only Son, but freely to give him to suffering and death, to purchase redemption for sinners. That mercy extended pardon, and peace, and the joys of paradise, to the penitent thief upon the cross. To this mercy no limits can be set; and therefore we say, a death-bed repentance is possible.

Whenever the penitent sinner comes unto that Saviour whom he had rejected or despised, he has the assurance that he shall “in no wise be cast out.”* With the grace of God, nothing is impossible; and by the power of this grace, the bed of death *may* become the scene of holy contrition, of strong crying and tears; and the earnest supplication of the dying penitent may reach the ears of the Lord of hosts, and call down his blessing on this late, this momentary, but this sincere repentance. God forbid, then, that we should shut against the dying penitent the arms of that mercy which has constantly been inviting him to leave the scenes of guilty pleasure, and to repose in peace on the favour of his God. No; God is merciful—Jesus Christ is mighty to save: his merits are all-sufficient—his grace is almighty; and if the moments of death be those of penitence, they shall be also those of peace.

But this death-bed repentance is *barely* possible: for,

2. Note its extreme difficulty.

* John vi. 37.

What is it which often deters men in the fulness of health and strength from this necessary work of repentance? What is it which prompts them to postpone it from day to day, from year to year—to postpone it to the bed of death? It is a work of unavoidable difficulty, of pain, of remorse, of pungent sorrow, and therefore men dread to enter on it. Is it then a work that is fit to be performed on the bed of death? Is the hour when the sinner is racked by the agonies of dissolution, the hour to sustain the remorse, the sorrows, the conflicts of penitence? Can the work of days, of years, of a whole life, be crowded into one day—perhaps one short hour, and that an hour of agony, the agony of death?

What are the constituents of repentance? It must be founded on a clear and strong sense of the evil and guilt of sin.

The penitent must discern sin in its most odious form, lifting up the arm of rebellion against the most high God; contemning the justice, violating the authority, abusing the goodness, trampling on the forbearance of the righteous and merciful Maker of the universe: he must behold it spreading disorder, corruption, and ruin through that world which, when it rose under the hand of the Almighty Architect, God pronounced to be good.

The penitent also must be deeply impressed with the evil and guilt of sin, in its effects upon his own soul; defacing that divine image in which she was formed; blinding her understanding, perverting her will, and corrupting her affections; and consigning her, in this world, to shame, to remorse, to misery—and in the world to come, to blackness of darkness for ever.

But are views of the evil of sin which are essential to true repentance, likely to possess the soul on the bed of death? They are excited and attained, under the influences of God's Spirit, only by much reflection, by serious meditation, by frequent and continued prayer: and do the thousand cares and fears which, at the hour of her departure, crowd upon the soul, and agitate her with unknown terrors, fit her for reflection, for meditation, for frequent and continued prayer? Is an hour of so much agony, an hour in which she can form just views of her own sinful state, and of the demerit of that sin under which she labours? On the verge of eternity, the fear of the wrath to come principally occupies the soul; and this least ingenuous motive to repentance is generally, if not the sole, the principal one that operates on a dying penitent. The demerit of sin, as an infraction of the laws and a contempt of the authority, justice, goodness, and forbearance of God, which so forcibly strikes the mind of the sincere penitent in the days of reflection, meditation, and prayer, seldom more than partially occurs amidst the pangs and apprehensions of a dying hour.

Genuine repentance also supposes sincere sorrow for sin, excited by a just sense of its demerit; but as this sense is generally imperfect in the dying penitent, so of course will be the sorrow which arises from it. At a period when the fear of that vengeance which, in an eternal world, will be poured upon the ungodly, racks the soul, how difficult will it be for her to acquire an ingenuous sorrow for sin, prompted by the views of its baseness and ingratitude towards God, the greatest and the best of Beings!

And alas! is a dying hour the proper season to form holy resolutions, and to renounce sinful passions and habits? Resolutions which require serious reflection, and the utmost vigour and decision, are to be formed when the soul is agitated by the terrors and pangs of death; and when the body, weakened and depressed by sickness, increases the terrors and pangs of the soul. Passions which, from long indulgence, have become the masters of the soul; and sinful habits which, long cherished, hold her in servitude—are to be renounced, to be relinquished. This work, a work of years, (alas! sincere Christian, dost thou not find it a work of years?) is to be done in a day—in an hour! This work, to which the soul should bring the most deliberate resolution and determined courage, is to be performed when she is weakened, distracted by the cares, the languishing, the fears of a dying hour! O God! but for thy superabundant and almighty grace, the resolutions of the dying sinner would be ineffectual, and his cries only those of despair! And the uncertainty whether this grace will be afforded, renders a death-bed repentance hazardous.

3. A death-bed repentance is most hazardous.

Its hazard arises in great part from its difficulty; which I have already illustrated. The difficulty of a work which requires the vigorous exercise of the powers of the mind in their full strength, must be greatly increased when those powers are enfeebled by sickness, and by the near approach of death. Hence there is great hazard that this work of repentance will not be performed on a death-bed. There must at this period be extraordinary supplies

of divine grace, to make up for the weakness of nature, and to enable the sinner to perform, in a short period of perplexity and anguish, the deliberate work of years. But what certainty is there that this extraordinary supply of grace will be granted? Can the expectation be founded on the promise of God? No such promise is given. Mercy indeed is assured to all who repent, at whatsoever period their repentance takes place; but extraordinary grace is no where promised to those who, in the season of health and strength, despise the warnings and resist the strivings of God's Spirit. On the contrary, as if to destroy this expectation, the succours of God's Spirit are promised only to the time present. "*To-day*, if ye will hear his voice."* "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near."† "In the day of thy visitation attend to the things that belong to thy peace, before they are for ever hidden from thine eyes."‡ There can be no expectation, therefore, founded on the promise of God, that extraordinary measures of grace will be afforded, to quicken and strengthen the repentance of a death-bed. There are indeed many considerations which indicate the unreasonableness and presumption of such an expectation. The sinner has devoted the whole of his life, and the vigour of his days, to selfish or sensual indulgence, and when his passions can be no longer gratified, and death and judgment are overtaking him, he cries to God for succour. When the past course of his life has thus been devoted to sin and to the world, can there be any reasonable expectation that his cries will be heard

* Heb. iv. 7.

† Isa. lv. 6.

‡ Luke xix. 42.

—that God will accept the refuse of his days, and make that penitence sincere and evangelical, which the fear of future wrath only has excited? Miracles of grace God indeed can perform; extraordinary supplies of his Holy Spirit we trust he does sometimes afford, to cheer the desponding soul, and to strengthen the pious desires and resolutions of the dying penitent; but no one can reasonably calculate on receiving this extraordinary grace. When the invitations of his heavenly Father have been slighted; when the calls of the Holy Spirit have been rejected; when its secret inspirations and monitions have been unheeded and despised—What! shall all this constitute a claim for extraordinary supplies of grace—for singular exertions of God's mercy? Presumptuous expectation! Sinner, let it not deceive you. If you delay your repentance to the hour of sickness and death, its difficulty will be eminently increased; more than ordinary grace will be necessary for you; you can indulge no solid expectation that you will receive it. How hazardous, then, to trust to a death-bed repentance!

It is hazardous also, for there is every reason to distrust its sincerity.

Cause indeed is there for distrusting the sincerity of the repentance which is excited in the near approach of that eternity where everlasting vengeance will be executed on the wicked—which is excited by the fear of death, that will translate the soul into this eternal state. Cause there is for distrusting the sincerity of those resolutions of amendment of life, which are formed as a relief from the agonies of conscience, and when the world has no longer any charms, and temptation no longer solicits.

The fear of punishment alone never excites genuine repentance. This evangelical grace must be founded on a lively apprehension of the baseness and ingratitude which sin displays, as a violation of the authority and laws of the greatest and best of Beings, God most holy, most just, and most good. But in a death-bed repentance, the fear of future wrath will generally predominate, and extinguish those ingenuous feelings which excite godly sorrow.

Nor can there be any certainty that those resolutions of penitence, formed amidst the terrors of conscience and the fears of death, and in the absence of all temptation, would not be forgotten or broken, should those terrors and fears be removed, and should temptation again assail the soul. The best, the only evidence of the sincerity of penitent resolutions, is found in the performance of them. The only test of genuine repentance is in amendment of life. Alas! there can be no such evidence, no such test, in a death-bed repentance. *Sorrow for sin* often proves as *transient* as the *affliction* or *fears* which excited it. Resolutions of amendment, formed in the dark and disconsolate hour of *adversity*, often vanish, like the morning cloud and the early dew, before the first beams of prosperity. What certainty can there be that such would not prove the repentance and resolutions of the death-bed penitent, were his life prolonged? He leaves the world, affording to others no certain evidence that his penitence is genuine, enjoying no comfortable assurance of it himself—unless it pleases God to grant him the rare and extraordinary manifestations of divine love. How hazardous is a death-bed repentance!

4. Lastly. It is only in part effectual, as it respects its future reward.

When all the difficulties of a death-bed repentance are overcome—when, notwithstanding the weakness of nature in her last moments of pain and agony, the penitent sinner, through divine grace, feels that godly sorrow which is a characteristic of genuine repentance, and forms true and steadfast resolutions of obedience—when the sincerity of his repentance is thus placed beyond all hazard, and he rejoices in a well-founded hope of the mercy of God—even then, a death-bed repentance, as it respects its future rewards, is only in part effectual. It is founded in the nature of things, it is founded in reason and justice, that there should be a proportion between the work and the reward: to suppose, then, that the sinner, whose life has been devoted to fulfilling the lusts of the flesh—who, so far from doing good in his day and generation, hath, by his injustice, his cruelty, his sensuality, disturbed the peace of society, invaded the rights of others, and corrupted, by his evil example and solicitations, the souls of men—who, so far from glorifying his God and Saviour by an holy life, hath practically denied him, contemned his authority, violated his laws, done despite unto his Spirit, and trampled under foot his precious blood; to suppose that the last moments of a life thus sinful, spent in the tears, the cries, and the resolves of penitence, will obtain the same weight of glory which will reward the uniform service of the prime and vigour of our years, is contrary to every idea of propriety and justice. No; God, the just Judge, who rewardeth every man according as his work shall be, will apportion the reward to the work

performed. The ability by which this work is performed cometh of God: its acceptance must be attributed to that mercy which is not strict to mark what is done amiss; and its reward, far transcending the merits of the best human performances, proceeds from that infinite goodness which delights in the diffusion of happiness. Of grace, therefore, is our salvation; and “not of works, lest any man should boast.”* But there is still a proportion between the rewards of heaven and the comparative advances in holiness of the children of God. As it respects, indeed, God’s kingdom in this world, our Saviour pronounced the parable of the householder calling his servants at different hours into the vineyard, and finally rewarding them all alike. But this parable was designed to repress the arrogance of the Jews, who would have excluded the Gentiles from an equal participation with them of the blessings of this kingdom. Early called into the vineyard, the Jews murmured against their Lord, because, though he fulfilled his covenant with them, he admitted, at the last hour, the Gentiles to an equal interest with them in Gospel privileges. “Thou hast made them equal unto us, who have borne the burden and heat of the day.”† And here the Sovereign Dispenser of grace vindicates his right to distinguish, according to his own will and pleasure, various portions of mankind with different degrees of spiritual light and knowledge. “May I not do what I will with mine own?”‡ Still, in the final awards of his justice, they who, equally distinguished on earth by spiritual privileges, have variously improved them, will be variously reward-

* Eph. ii. 9.

† Matt. xx. 12.

‡ Matt. xx. 15.

ed. For in the celestial house where the righteous dwell for ever, are many mansions; and in that new heaven, the habitation of the saints, one star differeth from another star in glory. How far inferior, then, will be the future glory of the death-bed penitent, who has only to offer the tears of contrition, the supplications of a wounded spirit, and the desires of a soul which pants for mercy—to that bliss which will be awarded to him who early forsook the ranks of the ungodly, and enlisted under the banner of his God and Saviour; who early took up his cross, to follow his divine Lord and Master; who early commenced that good fight, which terminated in complete victory over a sinful world, in the full attainment of grace and holiness; and for which, therefore, there is laid up the most splendid crown of glory!

Persevere, then, young Christian, with increasing fidelity and ardour, in thy warfare; for thou shalt increase thy future reward. Redouble thy diligence, aged saint; for the term of thy probation is nearly closed. Renounce without delay, O sinner! thy sinful course; for every moment's delay diminishes that bliss which, by patient continuance in well-doing, thou mayest secure: and a few days or hours, at the close of life, devoted to God, can at best obtain for thee but a distant view of that glory which, in its full radiance, fills with unutterable ecstasy the spirits of the blest.

Alas! that any should rest their immortal interests on a death-bed repentance. We do not declare this repentance impossible; on the contrary, we declare it is possible, through the extraordinary mercy and grace of God; and therefore we encourage and soothe the contrition and sorrow

of the dying penitent. But still a death-bed repentance is inexpressibly difficult—eminently hazardous—and recompensed, at best, with only imperfect rewards. Will any, then, rest their eternal happiness on a death-bed repentance? That repentance may never come: some sudden accident may in a moment cut asunder the tie that unites you to life; disease may instantly terminate your mortal existence; delirium, seizing your departing spirit, may render you incapable of reflection, of resolution—even of one prayer for mercy. Oh! fatal delusion! that has placed the interests of eternity on a death-bed repentance—which never comes.

Beloved brethren, oh! defer not to this uncertain, this hazardous hour—this hour of solicitude, of weakness, of pain, of agony—the work of repentance. Employ the season of health, of strength, of vigour, in this difficult, this arduous, but this indispensable work. Let your death-bed be the scene, not of your tears, your anguish, your conflicts; but of your praises, your joys, your triumphs. Then have recourse to your God—not as your Judge, to be appeased—but as your Father already reconciled. Then have recourse to your Saviour, not solely to shelter you from the tempest of the divine displeasure, but to support and conduct you through the darkness and trials of this dread hour, to the light and glories of eternity.

Oh, brethren! delay not until the last moment; sue for mercy, lest the door be shut.

SERMON XVI.

THE PETITION OF THE PENITENT.

LUKE xviii. 13.

God be merciful to me a sinner.

THE language of the publican is the language which the church daily puts into the mouths of her members during this season devoted to extraordinary exercises of humiliation and penitence. Not that she considers repentance as only an occasional duty, to be discharged only at a particular period: it is a duty of constant obligation—the paramount business of life. To confess, and to forsake our iniquities, are duties, from which, at no period, we shall be exempt, until the body of sin being destroyed, we shall shine for ever in the garments of holiness, as the angels of God.

But what is thus at all times obligatory upon us, the church enjoins more particularly at certain seasons. The various graces and duties of religion should be exhibited in our uniform character, and in the daily tenour of our lives. But their vigour would abate, and they would be in danger of total decay, did we not, at certain periods, by more than ordinary attention, brighten their lustre and infuse into them new strength.

The emotions and the holy resolutions of repentance demand, therefore, at stated periods, an extraordinary portion of our thoughts and of our

time. The season which immediately precedes the commemoration of the death of Christ as an atonement for sin, is most judiciously devoted, by our church, to extraordinary acts of humiliation and penitence. Directing our view to those sins which were the cause of those bitter sufferings and death of the Son of God, as the representative of our guilt, to the commemoration of which the present season is designed as a preparation, she enjoins on her ministers to weep, as it were, between the porch and the altar, and to say—"Spare thy people, good Lord, spare them, and let not thine heritage be brought to confusion." Calling on her members humbly and faithfully to review the sins which may have corrupted their souls, and involving them in guilt, insulted the majesty of their Almighty Sovereign and Judge, and exposed them to his just displeasure—she warns and entreats them to turn unto the Lord with all their hearts, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning; and with deep and lively penitence to offer the humble prayer of the publican—"God be merciful to me a sinner."

This should be the language of contrition.

It should be the language of faith.

It should be the language of holy resolution.

Penetrated with *contrition* for his offences, the penitent should implore mercy.

He must believe that God is merciful, or it would be in vain to utter the petition.

And he should form resolutions of a new and holy life, or his contrition would be feigned, and his faith presumptuous.

Thus, then, the state of penitence is a state of *contrition*, of *faith*, of *holy resolution*.

"God be merciful to me a sinner!" is the lan-

guage of every sincere penitent ; and it should be the language of contrition—contrition for having offended his God—for having contemned the mercy of his Saviour—for having corrupted his own soul—for having contributed to corrupt the souls of others.

Contrition for having offended his God—who, infinitely holy and infinitely good, demanded his adoration—who, infinitely just and infinitely powerful, claims his deepest reverence—who, the only source of perfection and felicity, is worthy of the liveliest homage of all intelligent creatures—the Almighty Being who made him ; on whom he is dependent ; who constantly preserves him, and bestows on him all his enjoyments ; and to whom he is to render an account. This God—to whom he is bound by the strongest and the closest ties of duty, of love, of gratitude, and of everlasting interest—he has offended, by transgressing laws, in themselves most reasonable ; in their consequences most beneficial ; producing purity, peace, unspeakable consolation—laws, to enable him to obey which, the necessary strength was afforded, and which are enforced by the highest sanctions—happiness without end ; misery eternal. And he has transgressed not only occasionally, not only by surprise, not only when assailed by powerful temptation, but deliberately, and perhaps in some cases habitually. Ah, brethren ! who is there that has not sinned—that has not done the things which he ought not to have done, and left undone the things which he ought to have done ? And yet the cares of the world, its business and its pleasures, so occupy men, that there are few who reflect that this is their sinful condition—that there is a God whom

they are bound to serve, that there is a God whom they have offended, and who will judge them.

But when the hour of reflection arrives—when some dispensation of Providence, some powerful call of God's Spirit, arouses the sinner; should he yield to the warning, and seriously meditate on his sinful condition, the dangerous ease of impenitence will be succeeded by the lively emotions of contrition. He will, in bitterness of spirit, acknowledge that he has violated the laws of his God, laws reasonable and good; that he has sinned against the Author of his being, the Preserver and Benefactor of his life, the merciful Redeemer of his soul; and that, in thus offending the greatest and best of Beings, he has disregarded the strongest dictates of duty, of gratitude, and of interest—"God be merciful to me a sinner."

But the penitent beholds still further aggravations of his guilt: he has neglected the mercy of his Saviour.

In his state of careless impenitence, this consideration would not have affected him. Perhaps, indeed, he had never doubted the divine mission of Jesus Christ, and always acknowledged his spotless character, and the benevolent object for which he came into the world. But as to the deep concern which he had in the great salvation proclaimed by Jesus Christ; as to the necessity of his securing an interest in the merits of this Saviour, in order to avert the just displeasure of the Almighty Being whom he had offended; as to the divine and exalted offices of Christ, as his Instructor, his Intercessor and Saviour, and his Almighty King, so powerfully demanding homage, gratitude, and love—on these points the impenitent sinner has been

wholly insensible. Alas! he has daily renewed those offences which rendered it necessary that the Son of God should suffer; thus crucifying him afresh, and putting him to an open shame. The invitations of this Saviour, proclaimed by the word, the ministry, and the ordinances of the church, he has daily heard, but he has daily neglected them. No real, no permanent sentiments of gratitude for that infinite love which purchased the favour of God and the glories of heaven for him who was the servant of sin and the heir of perdition, have been cherished in his bosom. Swayed only by his sinful passions, and occupied solely by his sensual pursuits, he is insensible to the guilt which he incurs, in neglecting and despising the riches of God's mercy in Jesus Christ.

But when he is awakened from this criminal insensibility, and is convinced of his lost and dangerous condition as a sinner, his contrition is heightened by the reflection that he has so long neglected the Saviour whose love has been so long exercised upon him, and he has despised it; who, by his agony and bloody sweat, by his cross and passion, besought him to turn from his sins; but he continued in them, trampling under foot the Son of God, counting the blood of the covenant an unholy thing—"God be merciful to me a sinner."

But the awakened penitent perceives that he has also corrupted his own soul.

Formed to contemplate and to imitate the divine perfections, and to obey those laws which are the transcript of divine holiness and purity, the soul cannot violate this law of her nature without being disgraced and corrupted. Every violation of the love, the duty, the gratitude which man owes to

the holy and gracious Author of his being, corrupts the heart, weakens its sensibility to goodness, and at length confirms it in the service, in the habits, and in the love of sin. Every violation of the virtues required by the relations of life or the ties of society, weakens some amiable sentiment of our nature, strengthens some criminal or unworthy passion, and finally extinguishing in cold selfishness every benevolent affection, fits man to be the scourge and the curse of his fellow-man. Every departure from those laws of self-government—of temperance, of purity, of contentment—which reason and the command of God impose, disorders the soul, and finally enslaves her to those passions which degrade the high nature of man to a level with the brute creation. Thus corrupting is sin, transforming the soul, created in the image of God, into the image of the fallen angel whom God has cursed; making the soul, instead of the abode of purity and peace, like “the troubled sea which cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.”* While the sinner, deluded by the phantoms of false pleasure, and ruled only by his passions, eagerly followed the path of sensual indulgence, he had neither the leisure nor the inclination to contemplate the odious nature of sin. But when, yielding to some merciful call of God’s providence, and to the awakening and enlightening influences of his Holy Spirit, he is led to sober reflection, he strips sin of the false charms with which his imagination and his passions had decked her: he contemplates her in the light of reason, of conscience, and of the word of God; and he is overwhelmed with shame

* Isa. lvii. 20.

and confusion for having cherished an object so corrupting, so dishonourable and base. Not only have I offended and contemned my God and Saviour, (is his sorrowing language,) by my iniquities, but I have deeply corrupted, by them, my own soul, and have rendered her tributary to passions disgraceful and degrading. Miserable man! I have rendered my immortal spirit, destined to live for ever in the presence of God, fit only to dwell with the devil and his angels—"God be merciful to me a sinner."

But the aggravations of his guilt rest not here. He has contributed to corrupt the souls of others. How many have his solicitations or his counsel allured from the paths of virtue! How many, who had just entered on the ways of iniquity, has he confirmed in the course that leadeth to destruction! The early glow of piety has been chilled by his sneers. The resolutions of more mature virtue have been checked by his ridicule or persecution. The timid he has discouraged, the feeble he has ensnared, and even the strong in virtue have not been unmoved by his assaults.

But, admitting that he has not been thus engaged in the impious work of making proselytes to wickedness, how pernicious has been that influence of his example, which must have been increased with the elevation of his talents, his character, or his station! In this view, the corrupting effects of sin are incalculable. The vicious example of one individual extends to thousands, each of whom becomes a centre, from which corruption spreads in every direction, multiplying its victims without number, and without end.

When the sinner, then, is awakened to reflec-

tion, how heavy does the guilt of having corrupted others rest upon his soul! How many have been induced to blaspheme their God, to neglect his ordinances and worship, to violate his laws, to indulge in sensuality and sin, through his solicitation, or through his example! He sees that he has not only corrupted his own soul, but the souls of others; and the burden of their iniquities lies heavy upon his conscience—"God be merciful to me a sinner."

These are the views which excite and heighten the contrition of the penitent: he has offended his God—he has neglected and contemned his Saviour—he has corrupted his own soul—he has contributed to corrupt the souls of others. Under the penetrating conviction of guilt, his awakened conscience would lead him to despair, were not his contrition enlivened by views of the mercy of God in Jesus Christ. So that the language of contrition is also the language of FAITH.

Between the evangelical graces there is an inseparable connexion; and the state of penitence implies not only the exercise of sorrow for sin, but of faith in God's mercy through Jesus Christ for the pardon of it. Repentance would be hopeless, if there were no mode revealed, by which the righteous Governor of the universe could, consistently with his holiness, his justice, and his divine authority, extend mercy to the sinner. But in every exercise of contrition the truth is present, to cheer and to comfort us, that God is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing unto them their trespasses and sins. The view of God's mercy to sinners, through his only-begotten and well-beloved Son, while it increases the pungency of remorse for having offended that gracious Sove-

reign who withheld not, as the price of our redemption, his only Son, presents also the only unfailing source of consolation. God's holiness accuses even the angels with folly: his justice demands the execution of the sentence—"The soul that sinneth, it shall die."* Reason and nature proclaim that God's holiness and justice must be preserved, and demand complete propitiation for man's transgression—a substitute, to endure, in man's stead, the penalty against sin, (the entire remission of which would be incompatible with the veracity, the authority, the justice, and the holiness of God.) The most perfect creature on earth, the most perfect creature in heaven, cannot render this propitiation, or present this substitute: for the most perfect creature, in the highest acts of obedience, only fulfils the law of his nature, and can have no superfluous righteousness with which to atone for the sins of others. It is then a dictate of reason, as well as a declaration of the word of God, that there is salvation in no other but in that only-begotten and well-beloved Son of the Father, who has made a full, free, and sufficient oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. Resting with full faith in the gracious assurance, that whosoever cometh unto God through this Saviour, he will in no wise cast out, the penitent, animated, and cheered, and comforted by the hope of forgiveness, can utter the prayer—"God be merciful to me a sinner."

But this is not only the language of faith, but of *holy resolution*.

Here also the connexion between the evangelical graces is abundantly evident. To suppose that sin-

* Ezek. xviii. 4.

cere sorrow for sin is compatible with a disposition and resolution to cherish it, is in the highest degree absurd; and equally so, to suppose that genuine and lively faith in the merits of Him who came to redeem us from all iniquity, will admit of the indulgence of it. The state of penitence, therefore, is a state of *holy resolution*. The penitent must aim at renouncing all those sinful passions and pursuits by which he has offended his God, contemned his Saviour, corrupted his own soul, and contributed to corrupt the souls of others. In every form, however alluring—under every guise, however seducing—sin must be his abhorrence; and so strong must be his aversion to it, that he must resolve to avoid even the appearance of evil. Renewed in the spirit of his mind, sanctified in soul and body, his life must exhibit, in bright lustre, “whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are lovely and of good report.”* To excite and enable him thus to advance in piety, in holiness, and in virtue, he enjoys the most powerful aids, even the influences of God’s Spirit—and the most interesting motives, even the hope of eternal rewards, and the fear of everlasting punishment. . Thus aided, and thus animated, he resolves to turn from his evil ways, and to love and serve the Author of his being, and the Redeemer of his soul. He resolves that the time past of his life shall suffice to have wrought the will of the flesh, and henceforth he will serve the living God: the time past of his life shall suffice to have walked in darkness—henceforth he will walk in the light of truth. No longer will he live to the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof;

* Phil. iv. 8.

but to Him who died to redeem him from divine justice, and who rose again to exalt him to the glories of heaven. With these holy resolutions is the prayer of contrition and of faith uttered—"God be merciful to me a sinner."

Brethren, it is the declaration of Him whose truth is as unchanging as his power is resistless, that except we repent, we shall all perish. Let us then humble ourselves in sincere and deep contrition, and let our hopes of pardon be placed only on the mercy of God, promised to mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord. Let it be our daily resolution and endeavour, through God's grace, to serve him in newness of life. With this contrition, this faith, this holy resolution, let our souls send forth the supplication of the penitent publican. Let this prayer be offered in secret, in the sanctuary, at all seasons; but with more frequency at those seasons when the church desires to humble her members in extraordinary acts of humiliation and repentance; and especially in that holy supper, where the pledges of pardon and peace, in the symbols of the body and blood of a crucified Redeemer, are extended to the penitent. Thus shall our repentance be accepted by that God who willeth not the death of a sinner; and our mourning and penitence in the church on earth, shall be exchanged for exultation and bliss in the church triumphant.

He who never utters this prayer of the penitent in sincere contrition, in lively faith, in holy resolutions of obedience, must be for ever a stranger to that mercy which he refuses to invoke, and to that peace which he rejects. But to the wicked, "God is a consuming fire."* The torments of that eter-

* Heb. xii. 29.

nity to which they are hastening, may wring from their souls this prayer for mercy—but it will be too late.

Now then, brethren, in this accepted time, this day of salvation, let us offer it with the deep sincerity of our souls—"God be merciful to us sinners." And let us go to that holy table, and plead the all-sufficient merits of him who is there set forth, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world, and God will be merciful to our unrighteousness, and our sins and iniquities will he remember no more.

SERMON XVII.

THE NATURE AND NECESSITY OF PRAYER.

MATT. vii. 7.

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

THE duty of prayer is enforced by the dictates of reason and the solemn injunctions of the word of God. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you;" is a declaration, which, while it establishes the duty of prayer, affords the most animating encouragements to the performance of it: for this declaration teaches us that prayer is the means of procuring whatsoever blessings our infinitely merciful and gracious Father may deem requisite and necessary, as well for the body as for the soul.

The Sovereign Arbiter of nature and of grace has so arranged the course of events, and of his moral dispensations, as to suspend his favours on the qualifications of his intelligent creatures, and particularly on their humble and earnest prayers. In this suspension of his favours on our humble supplications, there is not any thing which reason would not approve and sanction in a human governor or an earthly parent. The conduct of that magistrate would not be considered wise and prudent, who, intrusted with the sword of punishment for maintaining the welfare of civil society, should

remit the penalties of their crimes to offenders so hardened and arrogant as to refuse to entreat for pardon? Forgiveness granted to such offenders would not deserve the commendation of being generous and humane: on the contrary, it would be subject to censure, as calculated to give impunity to crime, and to loosen the bands of civil society. And surely that would not be wise and proper in the infinitely glorious Sovereign on whose decisions rests the harmony of the moral universe, which, in a human agent intrusted with the authority of society to promote its welfare, we should condemn as the height of folly and rashness.

Again; the human parent would not be considered as pursuing a wise course to improve the moral dispositions of his children, who should confer his favours on the arrogant child, who disputed the reasonableness of his requisitions, and disdained the respectful and dutiful language of supplication and entreaty. It is with the view to form in us the virtues of humility, submission, and holy gratitude, that our heavenly Father requires the duty of prayer. It is in the exercise of prayer that we are taught our dependence as creatures, our guilt as sinners; that we recognise the power of Him who ruleth over all, and with lively gratitude acknowledge the goodness of Him who gives us all things to enjoy. It is prayer which awakens in us a sense of the enormity of those sins, deliverance from which we supplicate; which engages us in earnest endeavours to subdue them; and which thus cherishes in the soul that holiness which constitutes her resemblance to God, who is infinitely holy, and reinstates her in the divine favour.

Prayer, then, is enjoined by God: it is the chan-

nel of communication between our souls and the Father of mercies: it is the means by which all holy tempers are formed in our hearts: it is the condition, in the performance of which we have the promise that we shall obtain what may be necessary and convenient for us—"Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

Let us consider the dispositions with which our prayers should be offered, in order to render them acceptable.

1. We should pray with humility.

That humble temper of mind which realizes the supreme authority and power, justice and holiness of the Almighty Sovereign of the universe, and our distance from him as creatures and sinners, lies at the foundation of the duty of prayer. If God were not infinitely powerful, just, and holy, and we weak, imperfect, and sinful, there would appear no cause to supplicate his favour, or to deprecate his wrath. When we contemplate him as that Almighty Being who at first spoke the world into existence, and whose providence sustains and directs the vast and complicated machinery of the universe, regulating the motions of the orbs that traverse infinite space, as well as the course of the humble sparrow that falleth to the ground; when we contemplate him as the Lord of the armies of heaven and of earth, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders; when we contrast with his infinite power and majesty, our own weakness and imperfection, sprung as we are from the dust, and fast tending to it again—unable to tell what a day may bring forth, or to preserve for an instant that breath which fleeth as

a vapour ; when to the consideration of our *weakness* and *imperfection* we unite the sense of our *guilt*, burdened as we are with offences that have insulted the Majesty of heaven and provoked the divine displeasure—alas ! surely we, who are worms of the dust, creatures of a day, sinners laden with iniquity, cannot approach the most glorious and high God with emotions of humility too profound ! “ God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace unto the humble.”* Humility is the disposition which becomes the suppliant ; for it discovers his sensibility to his own wants and to the power of his Almighty Benefactor.

Let us humble ourselves, therefore, brethren, before God, if we wish that he should exalt us. Let our humility be that of the heart, uniformly exerting itself in the virtues of gentleness and meekness. Let us not insult the all-seeing Jehovah with that spurious humility which, while it profusely pours forth the language of self-abasement, has not subdued the self-sufficiency of the heart, nor corrected a censorious temper and arrogant deportment, and which, in its lowest abasement, displays the rankest pride. Let us cultivate that humility which, realizing our manifold imperfections, subdues the arrogant, and censorious, and unkind passions, and calls forth the virtues of meekness, gentleness, and courtesy. Our prayers, thus offered in that humble spirit which prostrates us before God, and renders us lowly in our intercourse with men, will be heard and answered by that High and Holy One, who, though he inhabiteth eternity, dwelleth with the man that is of an humble and contrite spirit.

* 1 Pet. v. 5.

2. Our prayers should also be offered with penitence.

Humility has respect principally to the greatness and power of God, and our own weakness and insufficiency. Penitence contemplates chiefly his justice, holiness, and goodness; and our own guilt, impurity and ingratitude.

And, my brethren, who that for a moment looks into his heart, which so many evil thoughts and desires corrupt—who that for a moment reviews his life, stained with imperfections, with numberless violations, if not of social duties, of those which we owe to the all-powerful Maker and Preserver of our being—can say that he has not sinned—that he has no cause to acknowledge his iniquity, and to be sorry for his sin?

Ah! we *have* sinned. What shall we say unto thee, thou Maker, Preserver, and Judge of men? When we approach the throne of thy glory, our sins testify against us: when we plead for mercy, they cry for justice. O then, Heavenly Father, hear the intercessions of Him who hath made atonement. Touch our souls with contrition, that, confessing our unworthiness, thou mayest be merciful unto our unrighteousness, and remember our sins no more. O may our supplications, ascending to thy throne from hearts deeply penetrated with shame and sorrow, awaken thy compassion and secure thy favour! For the sacrifices which thou requirest are those of a troubled spirit: a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

3. We must pray with submission:

Submission to the infinitely wise and gracious purposes of Him who, while he worketh all things

according to the counsel of his own will, extends his tender mercies over all his works, and makes "all things work together for good to those who love him"*—submission to the merciful will of that Heavenly Parent, who often finds that it is a greater mercy to us to deny than to grant our supplications; and who often seeks to perfect our faith and patience, by delaying those blessings which are proper for us.

Short-sighted we are and erring—often pursuing evil under the guise of good, and rejecting a blessing because our weak judgment pronounces it an evil. But our Heavenly Father is infinitely wise and infinitely good. When he delays, mercy prompts; when he afflicts, it is goodness which guides the rod; when he withholds, it is wisdom, infinite wisdom which refuses to grant what, in ignorance of our best interests, we had asked. Let us then pray to this, the wisest and the best of Beings, submitting to his wise and good providence; and let us qualify our entreaties for deliverance from those temporal evils which we most dread, with the holy language of resignation—"Not my will, Heavenly Father, but thine be done."†

4. But while we pray with submission, we must pray with earnestness:

With an earnestness, in some degree at least, proportioned to the magnitude and value of the blessings which we implore, and to the greatness and seriousness of the evils which we deprecate—with an earnestness in some degree proportioned to the power, the glory, and the perfection of the High and Holy One whom we adore, and to our

* Rom. viii. 28.

† Luke xxii. 42.

incompetency to offer him, at best, a just tribute of homage.

When we contemplate the infinite perfection and goodness of that God at whose throne we are prostrate—the loving-kindness of him in whom we live, and move, and have our being—the numberless temporal and spiritual mercies bestowed upon us by that gracious Benefactor, who ever watches over us for good—above all, when we contemplate the glorious privileges of that redemption wrought for us by his eternal and well-beloved Son, our souls and all that is within us must be awakened with holy fervour to praise the Lord, and to magnify his holy name.

And alas! when we consider our frailty and infirmity, and review the many formidable evils which assail our feeble frames—the terror by night, the arrow that flieth by day, the pestilence that walketh in darkness, and the destruction that wasteth at noon-day; when our spiritual enemies encompass us—the world alluring, the flesh seducing, the great adversary assailing us; when the lake that burneth for ever opens beneath our wandering and guilty footsteps, whither shall we fly in fervent supplication, but to him who is the Father of our spirits, and beseech him to grant us health, and life, and strength, and salvation?

From thee alone, God of power and of goodness, cometh our help. Thy throne will we approach, and with holy earnestness invoke thy guidance, until thou bring us to thy holy hill, and to that eternal rest, from which, as the everlasting portion of thy saints, thou hast excluded sickness, and sorrow, and temptation, and sin.

5. But the earnestness of our supplications must be chastened by *reverence*.

We must be earnest, because our wants are manifold; we must be earnest, because many of the evils which we deprecate, and the blessings which we implore, are infinite; and we must be earnest, because the Being whom we worship is worthy of our warmest praises. But we must also be reverent; because Jehovah is a great God and terrible, clothed with majesty and honour. It would be a mockery of the High and Holy One, for creatures who, deprived of his sustaining power, would perish, to approach him with insincerity: and it would be an insult to the Sovereign Jehovah, for worms of the dust, for sinners laden with guilt, to approach him with bold familiarity, with careless and unadvised lips. Oh! let us not insult that Being, before whom angels cast their crowns and cherubim and seraphim veil their faces, with the light effusions of a frivolous heart: let us not dishonour him with the unhallowed language of a heated imagination: let us not provoke him by our bold expostulations, our familiar addresses, as if we were his equals. Great God! let us not thus profane thy name, lest thou punish us in thy wrath: let thy fear fall upon us, let thine excellency make us afraid.

6. And that our prayers may be accepted, we must pray with *constancy*.

It is the apostolic injunction, "*Pray without ceasing*;"* that is, we must constantly cherish the spirit of prayer, habitually lift up our souls to God in devout and humble aspirations, and persevere in

* 1 Thess. v. 17.

the regular discharge of the stated exercises of devotion in public and in private. Prayer which is inconstant and irregular, is unworthy of the name, insulting to the great and glorious Being to whom it is offered, and incompatible with that sincerity and earnestness which are the indispensable characteristics of true devotion. Under all discouragements and trials we should pray and not faint; for though God may for a while delay, yet he will finally come, and will not tarry. The Lord is the hope of his people; there is no Saviour beside him. On him therefore let us wait; let us tarry his leisure; let us be strong, constant, and persevering in our supplications, and he will finally comfort our hearts.

7. To insure the acceptance of our prayers, they must also be accompanied with holy resolutions and endeavours.

To come before the Most Holy One with hearts and hands defiled with iniquity; to adore his majesty, his power, his justice, and his mercy, while we discover in our lives no sense or acknowledgment of his glorious perfections; to implore from him the forgiveness of our sins, and to deprecate his displeasure, while we are continually adding to the catalogue of our iniquities; to beseech him to create a clean heart and to renew a right spirit within us, while we discover no solicitude and exert no endeavours to serve him in newness of life—oh! this surely is that hypocrisy which is hateful in his sight, and which renders the prayers of the wicked an abomination unto him. No; watchfulness must be united to our prayers, to render them acceptable and efficacious. While we humbly

implore the God of our salvation to redeem us from iniquity, we must exert our earnest resolutions and endeavours to cease to do evil, and to learn to do well; to put from us our evil doings, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God. Then only will our prayers and praises ascend as acceptable incense to that Almighty Jehovah who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and who cannot look on sin but with abhorrence.

8. But, lastly, vain will be our prayers, unless offered in faith.

Without faith, it is impossible to please God: for it is a self-evident principle, that "he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him."* To offer our supplications to a being insensible to our wants, or indisposed and unable to supply them, would be folly; and to offer our prayers to the ever-living God, without realizing those perfections which are the object of our homage, and those infinite merits of his eternal Son which are the foundation of our confidence, would be an idle and unprofitable service, and a mockery of his holy name. Faith then must animate and direct our prayers.

By faith we must realize the eternal Jehovah in all the fulness of his perfections, in his infinitely interesting relations to us, and in the resistless extent of his dominion. We must view him as that first of Beings, who laid the foundations of the earth, stretched forth the heavens, and still ruleth in that earth and heavens which are the work of

* Heb. xi. 6.

his hands. We must believe that this infinitely wise and gracious Being, whose is the whole earth, who knoweth all the fowls upon the mountains, and the cattle upon a thousand hills, is ever ready to open his hand and to satisfy the desires of those who humbly call upon him. Especially we must believe, as the only foundation on which, as sinners, we can stand, that this righteous Governor of the universe, whom by our sins we have offended, is in Christ reconciling us unto himself, not imputing unto us, truly penitent, our trespasses and sins. Adoring his mercy in the plan of redemption through his eternal Son, we must bring down every high imagination, and renouncing all confidence in our own merits, present our supplications only in the name and mediation of the great Redeemer. Whatsoever we shall ask which is necessary and proper for us, thus believing, we shall receive : for “ the Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, yea, all such as call upon him faithfully.”*

Behold then, brethren, the dispositions which alone can render our prayers acceptable to God. Cherish correct and lively views of the eternal and glorious perfections of the Being whom you worship, and a deep and constant sense of your own weakness, unworthiness, and insufficiency ; and offer your supplications with penitent, submissive, and obedient hearts, with lively, earnest, and persevering faith, to the Author of your being, the Benefactor of your lives, the God of your salvation, from whom cometh every good and perfect gift. Thus “ ask, and ye shall receive ; thus seek, and ye shall find ; thus knock, and it shall be opened unto you.”

* Psalm cxlv. 18.

SERMON XVIII.

THE NECESSITY OF DILIGENCE IN OUR CHRISTIAN CALLING.

2 PETER i. 10.

Give diligence to make your calling and election sure.

Is it possible, then, that an election can be absolute, unconditional, and certain, which we are exhorted to secure by our diligence? Is it not evident, on the contrary, that our calling must be a title, through the free grace of God, to particular blessings and privileges which it depends upon ourselves either to secure or to forfeit? Yes, my brethren, the election spoken of in Scripture is an election to spiritual privileges and mercies in the *present* life. It has no reference, as some sects of Christians in modern times have supposed, to the eternal destiny of mankind.

This election to spiritual privileges in the present life, which, in respect to our eternal existence, are to be secured by the fulfilment of the conditions on which they are suspended, has taken place from the beginning. God chose Abraham and his posterity to be his peculiar people: he called them to the knowledge of his name, his will, and his worship. The rest of mankind, left to the light of reason, and primeval revelation as handed down by tradition, would be judged by the standard of what they had received; and since to them less

was given, less would be required from them. The Judge of the whole earth will do right.

God chose, of the children of Abraham, the posterity of Isaac, and not of Ishmael, to be his peculiar people; and in like manner he chose the posterity of Jacob, and not of Esau, to receive the knowledge of his will, and to be the subjects in this life of his spiritual mercies. In this sense he is said to have "loved Jacob and hated Esau." But it does not follow, that because the posterity of Jacob and not of Esau were elected to be God's peculiar people on earth, that therefore all the posterity of the one were absolutely elected, by the sovereign decree of God, to everlasting happiness, which they therefore could not fail of obtaining; and all the posterity of the other reprobated, by the same tremendous fiat, to everlasting misery, which they could not fail of incurring. No; they will all stand at the day of judgment on the footing of their works—of what they have done, whether it be good or evil; they will be judged according to the improvement which they have made of the talents committed to them.

In like manner, God in his eternal counsels resolved to call both Jews and Gentiles to the knowledge of the Gospel of his Son Jesus Christ, and to make the conditional offer of salvation to them all: and those who accepted the gracious overture, who obeyed the merciful call, whether they were Jews or Gentiles, and believing on his Son Jesus Christ, were admitted into covenant with him by the sacrament of baptism, became his peculiar people—"the election of grace," as the apostle terms them in the Epistle to the Romans. This election of the believing Jews and Gentiles to the

blessings of the Gospel, was, in the language of the apostle, "through the free grace of God; not of works," not of any thing which they had previously done, or hereafter could do, to merit absolutely this distinguishing favour of their offended Maker. Indeed, even the final election of faithful and obedient Christians to everlasting life, cannot be, strictly speaking, of works: for it is the obvious sentiment of reason, that man, the creature of God's power, and the sinner obnoxious to his justice, cannot do any thing which will absolutely merit that everlasting salvation, which so much transcends the most exalted services which he can possibly render. This salvation must be the free, unmerited gift of that Almighty Maker and Sovereign of mankind, who, as he could in justice withhold it, in infinite mercy and love only dispenses it.

In calling mankind to the privileges of the Gospel in the present life, God acts as a Sovereign who has a right to dispense his unmerited favours to whom he will. But still the decisions of the last day will be regulated by those eternal and immutable rules of justice, which are the pillars that support the divine throne. God will judge every man according to his works; and the eternal destiny of those whom he hath not called to the kingdom of his Son, he will determine according to the use which they have made of the light and knowledge which he hath vouchsafed to them; they will be judged according to what they have, and not according to what they have not, through the merits of Him who was slain from the foundation of the world, in respect to the efficacy of that propitiation which he made for the sins of the whole world.

The Jews of old were denominated the chosen

people, the elect of God, because he had selected them from the rest of the world, to particular spiritual privileges. In like manner, the whole body of Christians are called the chosen generation, elected and predestinated, because they are called out of the rest of the world, to the blessings and privileges of the Gospel. But as neither the whole body of the Jews, though the elect of God, finally obtained his everlasting favour, neither will the whole body of Christians, though called to the knowledge of the Gospel, to the participations of the means and privileges of salvation, be finally chosen to everlasting life. They may fail to avail themselves of the knowledge which is afforded them—to improve the means of grace which they enjoy—to cherish the privileges extended to them—and thus finally become castaways. Their calling is conditional—their final election to glory is uncertain; awfully important, therefore, the exhortation—“Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure.”

Yes; all those now present, who have been admitted by baptism into the church, the mystical body of Christ—for which he purchased, by his death, the blessings of mercy and life eternal, and which he hath endued with his Holy Spirit, to be the mysterious but powerful agent of the satisfaction of its members—are the called, the elect of God. You are elected to the participation of all the glorious privileges of salvation; to the forgiveness of your sins—to the enlightening and purifying influences of the Holy Spirit—to the gracious guidance and protection of God, your heavenly Father—to everlasting life in his presence. This glorious election is conditional; its exalted privi-

leges you may forfeit; they can be secured only by true repentance and faith, producing holy obedience. The diligent and faithful servant of the Lord only will be rewarded; everlasting glory will be conferred only on those who are prepared by the holy graces which they have acquired to enjoy it. Reflect then on the exalted privileges to which you are called—reflect that your everlasting happiness depends on your securing them—everlasting misery is the penalty of your neglecting them. What force then in the exhortation—“Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure.”

Do you desire then to secure the glorious salvation to which you are called?

1. You must devote to it your supreme solicitude, attention, and exertions.

Our redemption from the ignominious bondage of sin; our adoption as the children of God; our attainment of the perfection and felicity of heaven, are objects which, infinitely important, should, above all others, awaken, interest, occupy all the powers and feelings of our souls. The necessity of solicitude and attention arises also from the number and magnitude of the difficulties which we have to encounter. The Christian life is a life of conflict with formidable enemies; with the sinful lusts of the heart—with the ensnaring pleasures of the world—with the temptations of the great adversary. In the work of salvation, therefore, the greatest solicitude and attention are necessary to ensure success. We must strive with intenseness and with perseverance to enter in at the strait gate, which only opens to the kingdom of heaven: we must direct our most vigorous exertions to the

attainment of those spiritual and celestial graces and virtues which only can secure to us the infinitely exalted privileges of our Christian calling, and prepare us for the enjoyment of the presence of God.

Behold the votaries of the world engaged in their favourite pursuits—With what unremitting assiduity do they follow up the chace of pleasure? What agitations, what chagrins, what disappointments overwhelm, but not intimidate, the votaries of ambition? What laborious application, days of toil, nights of thoughtfulness, are bestowed on the pursuit of riches? The world excites the supreme solicitude, and engrosses the undivided attention of those who choose it as their supreme good. Are the blessings of salvation of less value? Are eternal riches, honours, and joys, to be purchased with fewer sacrifices, with less application, with less devoted exertion? Shall we rate the everlasting favour of God at a lower price than those things of the world which he has stamped with vanity and decay, and from which death will wrest us for ever?

My brethren, it is a law of nature, that no object worthy of our pursuit is to be obtained but with solicitude, attention, exertion; and if these should be in proportion to the excellence and importance of the object of pursuit, surely a concern for our salvation ought to occupy the first place in our thoughts and exertions; and the present life, instead of being the sole object of our solicitude, should be regarded as of importance only as it is that state of probation allotted us for working out our salvation and securing an eternal inheritance. The privileges of our Christian calling—privileges which will confer peace on us here, and terminate

in endless happiness hereafter—are the infinitely important objects which, in the bustle of business, in the competitions of ambition, in the career of worldly prosperity, should fix supremely our thoughts, and regulate all our feelings and conduct. But further,

2. In order to make our calling and election sure, we must, in the exercise of true repentance, live in constant dependence on the merits and grace of Christ.

For, through his merits alone, (so it hath pleased our offended Sovereign and Judge to ordain,) salvation is attainable; and in his grace alone shall we find the effectual power of resisting temptation, and acquiring the virtues of the Christian character and life.

What was the trust of the apostle, which consoled him under the appalling conviction that he was the chief of sinners? What was the source of that dauntless courage, that heroic constancy, that triumphant hope, which distinguished him as the faithful and zealous servant of his divine Lord? We hear him declaring, amidst the highest attainments and the most exalted acts of Christian virtue, that it was not “he which thus lived, but Christ that lived in him; and that the life which he lived in the flesh, he lived by the faith of the Son of God.”* Here then is a pattern to all who are partakers of the Christian calling. Jesus Christ they are to adore, and in him they are to confide, as the Author and Finisher of their salvation; whose divine merits constitute their only claim to the for-

* Gal. ii. 20.

givenness and favour of their offended God ; and whose renovating and strengthening grace is the only fountain of those celestial virtues which will make them meet for the inheritance of glory. These merits will be applied only to those who, renouncing their sins and their self-righteousness, habitually rely on him who, the only Saviour, hath reconciled us unto God. And this grace will be bestowed only on those who, in true humility, seek it as the unfailing and abundant source of holiness, of strength, and of consolation.

Secure then, brethren, the privileges of your Christian calling, your redemption from eternal wrath, your title to heavenly felicity, by reposing, with lively and holy faith, on the all-sufficient merits of your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Let the hope of your deliverance from the power of sin, your restoration to holiness and virtue, be founded on his almighty grace enlightening your minds, purifying your hearts, strengthening you for the discharge of every duty, for the conflict with every temptation. Implore the holy influences of that Divine Spirit which animates that church, the mystical body of Christ, of which you are members ; and cherish and follow his blessed influences and inspirations, and he will confirm to you the glorious privileges of your Christian calling, will lead you with increasing vigour through your course, till at length, in the fulness of holiness and peace, you appear before God in the heavenly Zion.

But in order to become partakers of those divine virtues which are the gift of the Holy Spirit, and which are necessary to secure to us the glorious privileges of our Christian calling, we must,

3. Finally, constantly and faithfully aiming at abounding in all the fruits of righteousness, attend on all the divinely constituted means of instruction and grace.

Our vocation as Christians demands of us the renunciation of all sinful passions and pursuits, supreme devotedness to God, unfeigned love to him, and constant obedience to his commands. In those who are finally admitted to his holy presence in his kingdom above, every sinful passion must be subdued, and every holy grace established. To gain a victory over all their sinful passions, and to abound in righteousness, and goodness, and truth, must be the uniform object of those, therefore, who look forward to the glorious fruition of the divine presence in the kingdom of heaven. To aid them in this warfare, to insure their success in their holy aims, they are furnished with divine means of instruction and grace. The word of God is a lamp unto their feet and a light to their path. He hath promised to answer their humble prayers by the gift of his Holy Spirit. He hath insured to them the presence of this blessed Comforter, Sanctifier, and Guide, in the ordinances of his church on earth, in which they are to be trained for the joys and glory of the church triumphant in heaven. Devout meditation, therefore, on the word of God; frequent and earnest prayers to him for his Holy Spirit; uniform and faithful attendance on the worship and ordinances of the church—are sacred duties incumbent on Christians; they are the only means by which they can derive strength to resist and overcome the temptations which assail them, and to love and serve their God and Saviour; they are the only means by which they can be enabled

to fulfil the holy engagements and secure the glorious privileges of their calling in Jesus Christ.

How vain then the expectation, brethren, of securing the blessings of that salvation to which we are called, while we neglect, or only partially use the means which God for this purpose hath appointed! Is it possible to advance in the knowledge of the will of God—of the nature of the plan of salvation through Jesus Christ—of the duties and privileges of our Christian vocation, while we neglect the study of that sacred volume in which only these infinitely momentous subjects are exhibited? Can we hope to obtain the forgiveness and blessing of God, while we neglect the means on which they are suspended—earnest supplication and prayer? Can we expect to be trained up for the praises and bliss of heaven, while we neglect the worship and ordinances of God's church on earth? Let us not deceive ourselves. As probationers for an immortal existence, surely it should be our supreme concern and aim to prepare for the awful scenes which that existence will disclose. Let us then constantly and devoutly meditate on God's holy word: let us supplicate in earnest prayer his forgiveness and blessing—his grace to create a clean heart and to renew a right spirit within us: let us express our reverence and love towards him in the worship of his church: by our regular and devout attendance on its ministrations, let us seek to fortify our souls in all holy dispositions, and principles, and resolutions: let us study to be sincere and faithful members of Christ's church on earth, and thus to make our calling and election sure; and in his good time we shall be exalted to that heavenly kingdom where the redeemed of the Lord

cease not day nor night to celebrate his praises, and to partake of the fulness of his love.

Consider, I beseech you, the folly and guilt of neglecting and contemning the inestimable blessings of salvation which are proffered to us. God hath called us into his holy church, in which the merits of his Son are applied to us for the forgiveness of our sins; the powerful grace of his Holy Spirit dispensed to purify us from all iniquity, and to establish us in holiness and virtue; and everlasting life proffered as the prize of our high calling in Jesus Christ. When we may attain a destiny thus glorious, be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, shall we continue under the dominion of sin, and choose the miserable destiny of sinners? Shall the intercession of the Son of God be in vain exerted for us—the Holy Spirit in vain proffer his powerful aids and consolations—everlasting life in vain solicit our acceptance and excite our exertions? If so, better had it been for us never to have known the way of righteousness—never to have been called to God's grace and mercy. Health and prosperity affording the means of sensual enjoyment, may now appear to sanction the policy of that choice which may have devoted us to the world; but sickness and death are monitors that will come—unwelcome as they may be, come they will—and they are monitors that will speak—monitors which we must hear. In the dark and agonizing hours when sickness and death assail us, oh! how much, how much shall we need the support and the consolation which no human arm, no human voice can supply—the support and consolation that come only from the living God! Alas, alas! in the days of health and prosperity we des-

pised his warnings, we rejected his merciful invitations, we would none of his counsel ; and our perplexed and fearful spirits are left, solitary, unsustained, to look back on a life of folly and of sin, whereby we have forfeited our title as children of God and heirs of heaven, and made ourselves the bond-slaves of Satan and the heirs of hell.

But if to secure the privileges of our Christian calling be our supreme concern—if truly repenting of our sins, and depending on the merits and grace of the Saviour, and faithfully using all the means of divine instruction and grace, we seek supremely to love and to serve him who hath called us with our high, and holy, and heavenly calling—then we shall enjoy here a happiness which no changes can subvert, no afflictions blast ; and which even death, the universal spoiler, cannot wrest from us ; for death will then be stripped of his terrors, and welcomed as the messenger that leads us to the consummation of the privileges of our Christian calling, in the eternal vision and enjoyment of God—infinite truth, supreme good, exhaustless felicity.

SERMON XIX.

THE GRACE OF GOD REQUIRING HUMAN CO-OPERATION.

PHILIPPIANS ii. 12, 13.

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

To the man who seriously reflects on his spiritual character, on his condition as a candidate for immortality, the important inquiry will frequently occur—How am I to attain the salvation of my soul? In this momentous concern, am I to rely solely on my own endeavours? or are my own endeavours to be entirely superseded by the efficacious grace of God? My text resolves these inquiries—“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

The concurrence of human agency with divine grace is the important doctrine here established.

On this doctrine the following views may be presented :

1. There are two opposite opinions on the subject of human agency and divine grace, which are both erroneous.
2. The correct doctrine embraces a portion of both these opinions.
3. This doctrine is perfectly agreeable to reason, and may be vindicated from all objections.
4. Its practical influence is highly important.

1. On the subject of human agency and divine grace in the work of salvation there are two opposite opinions, and both erroneous.

The first opinion ascribes every thing to human agency, and discards divine grace.

The advocates of this opinion lay the foundation of their reasonings in support of it, in the nature of virtue. In what consists, say they, the essence of human virtue, but in the free choice of the human will? If man is irresistibly impelled by some superior power to a certain course of action, where is its merit or demerit? If he is thus bound by the iron chains of necessity, where is his freedom? And if controlled in his choice, where is his virtue? To be capable of merit or demerit—to be the subject of reward or punishment—man must be perfectly free; he must be the master of his own actions—free to refuse the good, or to choose the evil. In the work of his salvation he therefore must freely determine for himself, and must be controlled by no superior power; or he becomes a mere machine, incapable of virtue, unworthy of reward, and not justly obnoxious to punishment. Thus far the advocates for human agency argue correctly. Their reasonings are founded on the constitution of the human mind—on the immutable nature of virtue which exists only in free agents capable of determining their own actions—and on the nature of rewards and punishments which are applicable only to those who, impelled by no resistless impulse, have chosen the good, or pursued the evil. But when the advocates of human agency in the work of salvation advance farther—when they attribute to man that native clearness of perception which, without any superior illumination,

discerns in every case the nature and excellence of divine truth, and the nice and correct suggestions of duty—when they attribute to man that strength of will which enables him, unassisted by supernatural aids, to subdue the corrupt passions of his heart, and to resist the temptations of the world—they advance an opinion unscriptural, irrational, and contrary to universal experience. This doctrine, which attributes the exclusive agency to man in the work of his salvation, is one of the erroneous extremes on this subject. And that it is thus erroneous will appear, if we follow, as far as their legitimate reasoning extends, the advocates of the other extreme—of the doctrine of the resistless power of divine grace.

Is not man, say the advocates of this doctrine, a corrupt being? Do not the proofs of this corruption appear in the prevalence of his sinful propensities—in the ease and frequency with which temptation seduces him into sin—in the long series of crimes which darken his history—and in all the institutions of civil society which, remotely or immediately, are founded on human imperfection and depravity? And is it possible, say they, that a depraved creature, the very essence of whose depravity consists in the ardour with which he cherishes it, can rise, prompted by no superior impulse, to the exalted heights of virtue, or, unassisted, maintain his high station? Is not man, say they, a dependent being? and if his bodily health and his temporal mercies come from an almighty hand, is it not reasonable to conclude that his spiritual health and his eternal mercies must boast of a divine origin? If man can work out his salvation independently of supernatural aid, where is the

humility of the creature? where the glory of the Creator? Thus far the advocates of divine grace reason correctly. Their tenets are supported by the nature of man, by his relation to his Creator, and by the characteristic property of the plan of salvation—its being founded on grace, not on the claims of merit. Thus far every man, who has experienced either the power of his sinful passions, or has made any progress in subduing them, will bear testimony to their doctrine, and cherish it as fruitful both of virtue and consolation. But when the advocates of this important doctrine of divine grace push their tenets further; when they maintain, that so totally impotent is man, that he possesses, of himself, no power to cherish the influences of the Divine Spirit—so deeply depraved, that no native impulse to goodness warms his heart; when they maintain that the grace of God can never be arrested, nor finally quenched—that, on the contrary, by its irresistible power it infallibly conducts the person, once the subject of it, to final glory, while those who, by the decree of God, are destitute of it, infallibly fall into perdition—they equally oppose Scripture, common experience, common sense, and all the benevolent feelings of the heart: they make virtue, as it respects man, but a name—rewards and punishments arbitrary edicts: they transform man, who was created in the divine image, into a fiend irreversibly bound by the fetters of sin: they transform God, who, in his word, his works, and his ways, proclaims himself to be love, into a being swayed by passions that in man would constitute an odious tyrant.

In the middle point between opposite opinions, the luminous path of truth frequently appears.

Certainly, in the present case, according to the second view of the subject which was laid down,

2. The correct doctrine embraces a portion of both these opposite opinions.

We have seen that, to a certain extent, each of them has legitimate claims to truth. Human agency must be so far maintained as to preserve man's freedom and virtue, and to make this virtue capable of rewards and punishments: human agency must be so far exerted as to prevent man from becoming a machine, moved by the irresistible force of motives, as effectually as a piece of mechanism is set in motion by a physical impetus: human agency must be so far maintained as to make man guilty in freely rejecting proffered grace, and thus to remove the imputation of his destruction from the God who made him. On the other hand, the agency of divine grace must be so far maintained as to ascribe to this grace the power in man to think and to do whatsoever is pleasing to God—his sanctification, his progress in holiness, his conquest over temptation, and his final exaltation to glory. Less than this we cannot attribute to divine agency, when not resisted, leading man from grace to grace, until he arrive at the final state of perfect holiness, without being guilty of the impiety of making man his own saviour, of ascribing, in man's salvation, that glory to the creature which is due only to the infinite Creator.

Human co-operation with divine grace is the opinion which embraces whatever portion of truth exists in the extremes; and this is the unequivocal and uniform doctrine of the Bible; and which only gives clearness, consistency, and force to its decla-

rations. What mean those numerous exhortations to sinners :—Wash you, make you clean : put from you your evil doings ; make you a clean heart and right spirit—Cease to do evil ; learn to do well—Bring forth fruits meet for repentance—Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure ? What mean those cautions :—See that ye receive not the grace of God in vain—Harden not your hearts—Quench not the Spirit—Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall ? What means the holy circumspection of the apostle :—I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away ? What mean the promises and threats, the rewards and punishments which lie at the basis of all the divine dispensations ? All these, with the whole strain of Scripture, imply, beyond contradiction, that human agency must be exerted in the work of salvation ; that man is free to reject the Spirit of God, or to cherish his gracious influences ; and that this grace must be cherished, must be improved, or it will only tend to his condemnation ; and the greatest saint, even after having preached unto others, may be a cast-away.

On the other hand, divine grace is necessary to the sanctification of man, to his establishment in holiness, and to his final perseverance in the Christian life. To this point how explicit are the declarations : I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes—Ye are sanctified by the Spirit of God—Ye are saved by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost—Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves, but our

sufficiency is of God—The Spirit helpeth our infirmities—It is God who giveth the increase! Here the doctrine of divine grace, as the primary agent in the work of salvation, is plainly revealed. How then are we to reconcile human agency and divine grace? The apostle has determined this point in the words of the text. Both are to be preserved. We are to work out our salvation; for it is God that worketh in us. Our own exertions must co-operate with his grace. His Holy Spirit enlightens, renews, sanctifies, the heart—gives us the victory over temptation, leads us in the way of his law and in the works of his commandments. But if we resist and grieve his Holy Spirit, we may provoke him to take it from us. If we do not work out our salvation, God will not effectually work in us. The truth then on this important point is clear—We can do nothing effectually but by the preventing, assisting, and sanctifying grace of God; but, favoured as we are by his gracious influences, unless we make constant and vigorous exertions ourselves, we shall have received the grace of God in vain.

3. This doctrine of the co-operation of human agency with divine grace, thus expressly established in Scripture, is perfectly agreeable to reason, and may be vindicated from all objections.

On the one hand, consciousness assures every man that he is a free agent; that he may do or not do as he pleases; that, in regard to his volitions and his actions, no irresistible force impels or controls him. This free agency is essential to a moral and accountable creature; reason, therefore, can never relinquish it; she can never admit any doc-

trine which, by destroying the free agency of man, would destroy the morality of his actions, and his accountableness to the God who made him. Nor is she required to relinquish the free agency of man, by the word of God ; for we have seen that, throughout the inspired volume, God deals with man as a free agent ; as such, warns and invites him, threatens and promises him ; as such, places before him the good and the evil—choose ye which ye will serve.

But, on the other hand, consciousness and experience also impress on every man the truth, that his free agency is impaired—that his sinful propensities are strong—the temptations of the world powerful ; and the work of salvation is therefore eminently arduous. What then is the immediate suggestion of reason ? That man needs supernatural help. What is the immediate impulse of his heart ? To fly, in this his weak and helpless state, to that Almighty Being on whom he is dependent, imploring his succour. There is nothing therefore in the doctrine, that man in the work of salvation must be assisted by divine grace, which is not perfectly agreeable to the dictates of unprejudiced reason, and to the natural suggestions of the heart. To oppose this doctrine, because we are unable to comprehend the mode by which the Divine Spirit operates upon our minds, would be irrational, would be contrary to the dictates of sound philosophy. How many facts does the philosopher admit, for which he is utterly unable to account ! How many things there are in the constant observation of every man which he seeks in vain to comprehend ! The nature of his own mind, the nature of the bodies around him, the reasons why they are thus

constituted, are all inscrutable. In temporal things, man's knowledge is confined solely to facts: the moment he attempts to explain their remote and real causes, he becomes lost—he feels his ignorance, his weakness. Is it then wonderful or irrational that he should be unable to comprehend spiritual things? Here, as in temporal matters, he knows facts: all beyond is covered with impenetrable mystery. The fact that the Divine Spirit does operate upon our minds, is sufficient as a rule of our conduct and a source of consolation. The mode by which his operations take place is incomprehensible, and certainly, for any practical purpose, is not necessary to be known.

But if divine grace alone be efficacious in salvation, what then becomes of man's free agency? If man is by nature so weak and corrupt as to be unable by his own powers to resist temptation, and to work out his salvation, how can he be guilty, how can he be obnoxious to punishment? We answer:—Divine grace, so far from destroying man's free agency, perfects it. Weakened by the fall, divine grace repairs it. God, by his Holy Spirit, suggests to us good thoughts, puts into our minds good desires, applies to them the most persuasive and powerful motives, gives us strength to determine, to act; but, when thus prompted, urged, strengthened, the way in which we may act, and the choice which we may make, depend solely upon ourselves. We may do "despite unto God's Spirit," we may "resist" it, we may quench it, and thus receiving the grace of God in vain, bring on ourselves swift destruction; or, on the contrary, following its blessed guidance, we may be led into all

truth, sanctified in soul and body, and have our fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.

It is the rejection of the grace that enables him to work out his salvation, which constitutes the guilt of man and exposes him to punishment. No absolute decree, no imputation of another's sin, can make man guilty, or justly obnoxious to eternal misery: guilt implies actual, voluntary transgression, which it was in the power of the offender to avoid. Accordingly the Scriptures declare, that man is to be judged only for the "deeds done in the body." "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."*

It is the unsearchable will of God to make this life a state of discipline, in which we are to be made perfect through suffering; he has therefore permitted the sin of Adam to entail on his posterity a corrupt nature, suffering, and death. But coextensive with the effects of the sin of the first Adam, is the atonement of the second Adam, the man Christ Jesus, the Lord our righteousness. Through his merits and grace all men, though by nature children of wrath, possessing propensities deserving of God's displeasure, are put into a state of salvation in which their future destiny depends upon themselves—upon the improvement which they make of the grace given to them. This is agreeable to the reasoning of the apostle—"As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." Thus is the justice of God cleared of every imputation. All men are made free by grace to discern, and are made free through grace to perform, the things that are pleasing to God; and

* St. John iii. 19.

according to the proportion of light and grace which they have received will they be judged: of those to whom much is given, will much be required; and of those to whom little is given, will little be required. Thus is the doctrine of the necessity of grace in the work of salvation freed from every difficulty, made perfectly compatible with the moral agency and accountableness of man, and with the attributes of that Judge of all the earth who hath declared that he will do right, and that he is not a hard Master, reaping where he has not sown, and gathering where he has not strawed.

But do we, by the doctrine of human co-operation, make void divine grace? God forbid! We rather magnify the same. What is the doctrine of the church? "Man, by his own natural strength, cannot prepare himself for good works and calling upon God;" it is "the grace of God in Christ working in him a good will, and working with him when he has a good will." Thus does the grace of God begin the spiritual life, preserve it in every stage, and finally bring it to perfection. Is not this magnifying the grace of God? But is this grace resistless? Does this grace do every thing? No; mark the cautious expression of the article of the church which has just been quoted: the grace of God works *with* man; man works, but to render his working effectual, the grace of God must co-operate with him. What is this but the doctrine of human co-operation with divine grace? What is this but the language of St. Paul—Work out your salvation, for it is God that worketh in you? To maintain that this grace is irresistible—that it is the sole agent in the work of salvation, would be contrary to the express tenour of Scripture. So far from

magnifying divine grace, it would degrade it, making it destructive to man's freedom, to his virtue, and to all the moral attributes of God. It is impious to ascribe to this wise and just Being the inconsistency of making man a moral and accountable agent, and yet of controlling him by an irresistible power. The advocates of this doctrine, and not of human co-operation with divine agency, detract from the glory of God. It is this latter doctrine only which gives consistency and beauty to all the divine dispensations; which displays the Deity in the most interesting of all possible characters, the merciful Ruler of moral and accountable creatures, the righteous Rewarder of them who diligently seek him.

We are now prepared for the

4. Last view of this subject—The practical influence of the doctrine of the concurrence of human agency with divine grace in the work of salvation.

Its practical influence is to keep us from distrust on the one hand, and presumption on the other; and to lead us diligently, earnestly, and zealously to work out our salvation. Were we left entirely to ourselves in this important concern, to the blindness of our own reason and the weakness of our own resolution, well might we exclaim—Who is sufficient for these things? We should sink in hopeless despondency. On the other hand, were we taught that the grace of God is to do all; that this grace is resistless; and that, when it seizes us, it will infallibly save us; we should be elevated to the dangerous extreme of presumptuous security. But when we are taught that, though God works in us, we are also to work, while with fear

and trembling, considering our own weakness, and the possibility, by neglecting divine grace, of falling short of our salvation—we are preserved from presumption; confiding in the almighty power of Him who works in us according to his good, his merciful and gracious pleasure, we are saved from distrust.

Behold then, brethren, the highly momentous force of the apostolic injunction—"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." God infinite, eternal, almighty—he is our helper: by his power he works in us both to will and to do. But we hold this grace, without which we can do nothing, at the good pleasure of his will: he has declared, that if we resist his grace, and do despite unto his Spirit, he will take it from us; that, if we hear not his voice, but harden our hearts, he will swear in his wrath that we shall not enter into his rest. Let us then, with "fear and trembling" lest we forfeit his grace, "work out our salvation;" let us "give all diligence to make our calling and election sure;" faithfully using all the means of grace—the worship and ordinances of the sanctuary, frequent and humble prayer: let us daily, hourly, constantly strive to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, to mortify our evil tempers, to subdue our sinful habits, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; to keep a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man; to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. At the same time let us remember, that we are enabled thus diligently to work out our salvation only by the preventing and

quickenings grace of God; and that the pardon of our sins and the glories of heaven—blessings to which by nature we can lay no title—are the free gifts of his mercy, through Jesus Christ. Let us then, when we have done all, acknowledge that we are unprofitable servants—"Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory." "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." And that God would thus work in us, and enable us to work, let us beseech him in the language of the church:—"Grant to us, Lord, we beseech thee, the spirit to think and do always such things as are right; that we, who cannot do any thing that is good without thee, may by thee be enabled to live according to thy will, through Jesus Christ our Lord." "Lord, we pray thee, that thy grace may always prevent and follow us; and make us continually to be given to all good works, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

SERMON XX.

SELF-COMMUNION.

PSALM lxxvii. 6.

I commune with mine own heart, and search out my spirit.

THE active spirit of man will always be employed; the exercise of thought and reflection is inseparable from the human mind; and therefore there is no man who does not, in a greater or less degree, commune with his own heart, and search out his spirit. The objects indeed on which this meditation may be exercised are various. In the choice of them also, men are unhappily directed, not by the sober voice of considerate reason, not by the divine guidance of religion, but by the caprices of a wayward fancy, and by the powerful suggestions of corrupt passion. The thoughts of their minds, that should aspire after spiritual and immortal truths and blessings, are therefore principally confined to the degrading and short-lived objects of time and sense.

And yet, brethren, on this communion with our heart depend the perfection or the degradation of our nature in the present life, and our eternal happiness or misery in the life which is to come. If our thoughts are occupied solely or principally with the plans of sensual gratification; if wealth, honour, and pleasure alone engross our affections; if worldly pursuits and enjoyments be thus the objects

of our supreme attention, our souls will be degraded from their true perfection and happiness in the present life, and totally disqualified for the pure and spiritual joys of the kingdom of heaven. Not in this sensual, degrading, and corrupting communion with the heart did the psalmist indulge: it was that holy meditation which was calculated to advance the dignity, the purity, and the perfection of the soul, and to qualify it for immortal joys—"He communed with his own heart."

Let us then consider the duty of communion with our hearts, in reference,

1. To the *subjects* on which it should be exercised; and,
2. To the *motives* which should lead to it.

1. We should commune with our own hearts, and search out our spirits, with regard to our *spiritual character and destiny*.

What are we? and for what are we designed? These are surely the first and the most important subjects that should engross our thoughts, and which should awaken our earnest and supreme solicitude. Are we the mere creatures of sense, made to obey only the mandates of the passions? Do we hold no higher rank in the scale of being than the brutes, which, prompted only by appetite, and guided only by instinct, pursue, with undeviating course, sensual gratifications? Are our views designed to be confined solely to this transitory and corrupting world, in which those numerous paths which seem to invite to the bowers of pleasure, all terminate in the dreary waste of disappointment and vanity? Is the bright sun of our being to light up only a few short and clouded

years, and then to sink for ever in the darkness of eternal night? Is the arm of death, which no power can arrest, no art elude, to wither the powers of our nature and extinguish all our joys? No, surely. Reason, consciousness, the voice of God speaking to us in his holy word, assure us that we possess a nature far exalted above the brutes that surround us; that the spiritual agent which stirs within us, is sprung from a divine source—from that infinite, spiritual, eternal, perfect Being, who formed us after his own image; that we are distinguished by high and vigorous powers of intellect, not to be bounded by the narrow limits of corporeal existence, but to range through the infinite world of intelligences, and to ascend from the gross and sensual objects around us, to the contemplation of spiritual and immortal objects—to reach even the eternal Fountain of truth and felicity, and in the adoration and love of the greatest and best of Beings, to find all its powers perfected, all its affections gratified, all its hopes realized. Yes; reason, conscience, the word of God, teach that this life is but the commencement of our existence, the present world but the threshold of our being; and that, when translated from this transitory life and this perishing world, we shall be ushered into a perfect and endless existence, and into that celestial world which, through the revolution of ages, shall know no period. Reason, consciousness, the word of God assure us, that we were made for the knowledge and service of our Almighty Maker—for the fulness of felicity in his holy presence.

Let us then hold frequent communion with our hearts, brethren, on our high rank in the scale of

being, on the exalted destiny which the Almighty has assigned us.

Yet, alas! in communing with our hearts concerning our spiritual character and state, truths humiliating and painful will force themselves upon us. Formed originally with powers which both fitted and prompted us to aspire after the knowledge and enjoyment of the infinite Fountain of truth, goodness, and felicity, the view of our present character and condition will force us to exclaim—"How is the gold become dim! how is the fine gold become changed! The crown is fallen from our heads—Wo unto us, for we have sinned!" Our nature degraded and corrupted by transgression, we are obnoxious to the displeasure of Him who is great in power and inflexible in justice, and who will not spare the guilty. There is "a law in our members warring against the law of our mind, and bringing us into captivity to the law of sin." "When we would do good, evil is present with us." Conscience bears her testimony, that, in disobeying the dictates of reason, we have violated the righteous laws of Him who made, and rules, and is to judge us. Serious and faithful communion with our hearts will force on us the lamentable truth, that we are sinners, undeserving of the favour of our God, and obnoxious to his displeasure. "Wretched men that we are, who shall deliver us from the body of this death?"

Thus, then, we should commune with our hearts,

2. Concerning the means of release from the bondage of sin, and of securing our spiritual perfection and happiness.

Can we find these means in the *world*--in the lights and efforts of unassisted *reason*?

Can we find the means of securing our spiritual perfection and happiness in the *world*? The world is the enemy of our spiritual and immortal hopes; the world is the enemy whose temptations we are to shun with the greatest solicitude, whose allurements we are to resist with the most sacred resolution: for inspiration hath pronounced—"The friendship of the world is enmity with God." With the world, indeed, we must in some measure be occupied; to its numerous duties we must be sedulously attentive; of its innocent pleasures we may occasionally and with moderation partake. But if we give up to the world the whole of our affections and of our time; if we expect, by the devoted pursuit of its treasures and honours, and by the eager indulgence of its pleasures, to advance our true perfection and happiness, how great will be our disappointment! how deplorable our mistake!

Commune then with your own hearts concerning the world; consult your own experience, appeal to your experience, and see how vain are all its allurements, how uncertain all its plans, how unsatisfying all its joys, and how dangerous and corrupting its temptations. Idle and delusive, then, the expectation to advance our spiritual perfection and happiness by devotion to a world which lieth in wickedness, whose flattering prospects terminate in disappointment, and which is to be consumed by the fires of the last day.

Can we advance and secure our spiritual perfection and happiness by the unassisted lights and efforts of *reason*?

But what does unassisted reason teach us? Does it yield certain information concerning any one topic interesting to our perfection and happiness? Does it disperse the darkness which surrounds the existence and character of the invisible first cause? Does it allay the apprehensions which transgression, alarming and rousing the conscience, excites? Does it open to the trembling spirit the bosom of mercy, on which it may in safety repose? Does it dispel the anxious doubts which agitate the soul when she approaches the confines of time, and with eager, but with vain desire, seeks to explore the unknown region of eternity? Ah! here it is that human reason, when we most need her consoling support, leaves us to cruel uncertainty and doubt. Commune, then, brethren, with your own hearts; call in the wisdom of the sages of the world, and see how little light, how little satisfaction reason can afford you in the interesting concerns of your spiritual perfection and happiness.

Baffled in our appeal to the world, to the light and strength of unassisted reason, we have but one resource—the *Gospel of Christ*.

The exalted truths which it reveals afford the only certain means of advancing and securing our everlasting perfection and happiness. How bright the lustre which the Gospel sheds on the character and attributes of the Almighty Being whom we are to serve, and by whom we are to be judged! How rich the provision which it makes, in the grace and mercy of a Saviour, for our recovery from our low estate of guilt and misery! How luminous the path which conducts through the valley of the shadow of death to immortal glory! The treasures which the Gospel unfolds, while they enrich and gladden the

heart, can never be corroded by care and disappointment—can never be wrested from us by death, the destroyer of all earthly treasures. On the unsearchable riches of the Gospel commune seriously and earnestly with your own hearts, and you will find at length the pearl of great price—that exalted happiness which will gratify your most ardent desires, which will prove worthy of your most noble powers, which will be your companion throughout the ages of eternity.

In the Gospel of Christ, then, you find the only certain means of securing your spiritual perfection and happiness. Commune then,

Lastly, with your hearts, and inquire concerning the *progress* which you have made towards the attainment of these infinitely important objects.

Jesus Christ is offered to us in the Gospel, as our all-sufficient Saviour. That mercy which allays the pangs of guilt, and diffuses through the heart the holy peace of God—that grace which will be made perfect in our weakness, which will enable us to triumph over all the enemies of our salvation—that fulness of bliss eternal in the heavens, surpassing at once our conceptions and our desires—he offers us, as the free gift of his infinite love. Our complete and final title to them he rests on our sincere repentance for our sins—on our lively faith in his power, mercy, and grace—on our steadfast obedience to his laws, and submission to his ordinances, as our rightful Sovereign and Lord. Are we desirous to fulfil the conditions on which he suspends these infinitely exalted blessings? Are we, through his grace, continually advancing towards the fulfilment of those conditions?

Let these be the infinitely important topics on which, in the hours of sacred retirement, you commune with your hearts. If the result of the solemn inquiry should be, that you are indifferent to those means of securing your spiritual perfection and happiness which Jesus Christ has provided in his Gospel; if it should appear, that, while he offers you the inestimable blessings of his mercy, you continue insensible of their value and of your need of them, regardless of his ordinances and laws; determine, without delay, no longer to contemn that Gospel which is the power of God unto salvation—no longer to cast from you the immortal glories which a divine Redeemer offers you. Consecrate the moments of retirement to your eternal interests, to your souls, to God your Saviour, and implore his pardon, his intercession, his renewing and sanctifying grace.

If, on the contrary, the result of this sacred communion should be, that in the humble exercise of penitence and faith you have devoted yourselves to your Saviour, and sought his mercy and grace in the ordinances of his church, resolve to adhere, with a stronger faith and more ardent devotion, to *him*, who alone is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of your God.

You have now seen, brethren, the *subjects* on which this sacred communion with the heart should be exercised—on our spiritual character and destiny—on the means of attaining our spiritual perfection and happiness—on the progress which we have made in securing these infinitely important objects.

Let us consider the *motives* that should urge us thus to commune with our hearts.

It is an *honourable* employment.

What is it which in the world affixes reputation to character? Is it not thoughtfulness, consideration, prudence, and caution in the management of worldly business, and in the various pursuits of life? This thoughtfulness, this consideration, so honourable to you in the world, we call on you now to exercise on objects infinitely more important, and which of themselves will stamp dignity on all the means employed to obtain them. To pass through the world totally regardless of those pursuits and duties which are necessary to our welfare and prosperity in it, would be justly deemed folly and madness. What shall we say of those who pass through the world entirely indifferent to their spiritual character, heedless of those immortal interests, in comparison with which all temporal concerns are but as dust in the balance? What shall we say of him who never retires from the busy scenes and gay pleasures that surround him, to commune with his heart concerning his spiritual and immortal interests, the means of securing the favour of that Almighty Judge, at whose tribunal he is to receive his everlasting doom?

Brethren, this sacred communion with the heart is essentially necessary.

It is necessary to the sinner—to him who is living in a state of impenitence and forgetfulness of God.

Alas! if he never stops for a moment in the career of transgression; if he never for a moment pauses, and permits conscience to raise her remonstrances at his sinful course; if he never gives

himself time seriously to reflect that there is a God, a judgment, an eternal existence—obduracy will soon seal his heart; given up to a reprobate mind, God will not be in all his thoughts. Arouse, then, sinner; reflect on the guilt and danger of thy impenitent course: seek thy God while he may be found, call upon him while he is near.

This sacred communion with the heart is also necessary to the sincere Christian.

It is necessary to his perfection in the Christian graces, and to his enjoyment of the Christian hopes.

In proportion as you retire, Christians, from the bustle and gayety of the world, to commune with your own hearts, to hold converse with your God, to meditate on the mercy and love of your Saviour, on the riches of the eternal inheritance which he has provided for you, will be your progress in piety and virtue, and your consolation and joy in your holy course. Blessed is the privilege of meditating on heaven and heavenly things! Happy above the happiest moments which you can find in the world, are those which are devoted to your God, to communion with him, to the anticipation of the bliss prepared for you in his presence. In these devout exercises you will find a solace for all your cares, a healing balm for your wounded spirit. In sacred communion with your hearts, you will experience that God is gracious; that blessed are all they that trust in him; that you are strengthened against temptation; that you are raised above the imperfect joys of the world, and prepared for that heaven where there is fulness of joy, and where there is pleasure for evermore.

SERMON XXI.

CONSIDERATION OF TEMPORAL AND SPIRITUAL DUTIES.

ROMANS xii. 11.

Not slothful in business ; fervent in spirit ; serving the Lord.

THESE words are an admirable summary of the duty of a Christian ; they are an appropriate and forcible exhibition of his external conduct as it regards the world, of the temper of mind which he should cultivate towards God, and of the great end at which he should aim in all his actions, and the principle by which he should regulate all his dispositions and affections. As it respects the world, he is enjoined “ not to be slothful in business ;” as it respects his piety to God, he is to be “ fervent in spirit ;” and the great end at which he should aim in all his actions, and the principle by which he should regulate all his dispositions and affections, is “ serving the Lord ” He is not permitted to extenuate or excuse his indolence or negligence in the concerns of the world, by the plea of being engrossed by the fervour of his religious feelings. He is not to excuse his lukewarmness in the exercises and duties of religion, by the care and diligence which his worldly affairs demand. Nor is he to defend either that excessive devotedness and diligence in the concerns of the world, which lead him to neglect the duties of a fervent piety, or that immoderate fervour of religious feeling which

prompts him to neglect or contemn his worldly business, by the pretext that God is to be served solely by worldly industry on the one hand, or religious fervour on the other. No; according to the injunction of the apostle, these duties are all of indispensable obligation, and all strictly compatible; and they have an important influence upon each other—"Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord."

Let these then be the divisions of our discourse:

1. These duties are all binding upon us.
2. They are strictly compatible with each other.
3. And they have a mutual and important influence.

1. These duties are all binding upon us.

"Not slothful in business."

The universe is full of motion; countless worlds incessantly rolling through immeasurable space, proclaim that activity is the first law of nature. The great Creator himself is unceasingly occupied in superintending that universe which his power called into existence, and in diffusing through its almost infinitely distant parts, life, and glory, and felicity: his eternal perfections lead to incessant and ineffably exalted activity.

That blessed personage who, the brightness of the Father's glory, went through a series of the most active and painful labours for the salvation of the human race, is still incessantly engaged, at the right hand of the Father, in pouring forth intercessions for those for whom he shed his blood, in dispensing his truth and his grace to guide and defend his redeemed people.

Angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim,

the most perfect and the most blessed of the numerous ranks of created beings, find their felicity in unceasing activity—in doing the pleasure of Him whose throne they surround, whose glorious praises they cease not day nor night to celebrate.

Even those lower ranks of beings who are destitute of the active principle of intelligence, are urged by that instinct with which Almighty Power hath endued them, to industry and labour—industry and labour often even more than necessary to their preservation and comfort.

Shall then the universe, through its boundless range—shall the Creator of the universe, the eternal Fountain of being and felicity—shall the Redeemer of the world, God over all, blessed for evermore—shall the host of heaven, foremost among intelligent creatures—shall they who, guided only by instinct, rank lowest in the scale of animate creation—shall all these be active and industrious, and in that activity find their perfection and bliss; and shall man be sluggish and indolent, man who, made but a little lower than the angels, ought most to resemble them in vigour and activity? No; the powers of the human mind, so vigorous and inquisitive, prove that man was designed for action, for labour, for industry. By exercise only can his intellectual powers be preserved from decay, and be advanced in strength and purity. By useful employment only can that vacuity of mind be prevented which is the bane of real enjoyment, and in which, as a hot-bed, shoot up the rankest vices. By industrious application of his body and mind only can he provide for the comfort and welfare of those whom nature hath made dependent on him, and discharge his duty to society, which, extending to

him protection and support, demands from him that exertion which is necessary to preserve and advance the strength and the purity of its institutions.

Thus then do the most powerful considerations enforce the obligation of the duty “not to be slothful in business.”

To the injunction, “not slothful in business,” the apostle joins “fervent in spirit.”

By this is meant spiritual fervour, temporal zeal being already sufficiently enjoined in the prior command, “not to be slothful in business.”

There is not a consideration which has been urged to establish the obligation of diligence in our temporal, which does not apply, with increased force, to prove the duty of zeal and fervour in our spiritual concerns. Eternity, in its duration, its occupations, and its enjoyments, infinitely transcends the duration, occupations, and enjoyments of time. A spiritual and immortal life infinitely exceeds in value a life corporeal and mortal. The eternal Fountain of being, perfection, and happiness, is infinitely exalted above any object which can here occupy our labours or claim our exertions. If then temporal zeal be incumbent on us, how great must be the obligations of fervour with respect to those spiritual objects which are of infinitely transcendent importance!

But the pious fervour which is thus of indispensable obligation, is not that extravagant fervour which, consisting in inflamed passions, prostrates the reason and the judgment; which, following the impulses of a heated imagination, violates, in its religious exercises, what in all cases ought to be observed, the dictates of common sense, and

the rules of propriety and order ; and which approaches the great and glorious Being, before whom cherubim and seraphim fall prostrate, with presumptuous and irreverent boldness and familiarity. The fervour in spirit here enjoined, is that lively and sincere love to God, as the greatest and the best of beings, and that earnest, persevering zeal in his service, in the discharge of every religious, moral, and social duty, which is chastened and regulated by sober judgment and prudence, by a regard to order and decency, by profound reverence and awe of God's holy name : and our reason immediately acknowledges that a Being infinitely great, glorious, and good, our Creator, Benefactor, and Redeemer, infinitely merciful and gracious—who, in his Son Jesus Christ, has provided for us pardon, and grace, and everlasting life—demands the liveliest and most fervent homage and devotion of our hearts.

Who would not think it dishonourable to contemplate human excellence with indifference—to receive the favours of an earthly benefactor with cold ingratitude—to be unmoved when exalted human virtue displays its exciting and attractive lustre ? How fervent and animated, then, should be the feelings with which we contemplate the perfections, celebrate the praises, and recount the loving-kindness of that infinitely exalted and beneficent Being, before whose perfections human excellence fades away, and whose goodness and mercy provide for us all the enjoyments of time, and all the blissful hopes of eternity ! Be ye then “ fervent in spirit.”

“ Serving the Lord.”

His service indeed should be the end and aim of

all our actions, and should regulate all the affections of our souls; and ought not an intelligent creature to serve the all-glorious God who made him, and who, at his pleasure, can recall the being which he gave? Ought not a sinful and guilty creature to serve that Sovereign Judge whom he hath offended, and at whose tribunal his eternal doom must be pronounced? Ought not the penitent to serve that merciful God who hath forgiven him all his sins, and blotted out all his iniquities? And ought not the Christian to serve that merciful Lord who hath redeemed him by the blood of his Son, sanctified him by the grace of his Holy Spirit, and prepared for him an eternal weight of glory? The relations which we sustain to God our Creator, Benefactor, Redeemer, all demand from us, that, as creatures made, preserved, blessed by him—as sinners pardoned and comforted by his mercy and grace in Jesus Christ—as Christians, who are here the subjects of his infinite love, and who are destined for the full and endless joys of his presence hereafter—we should make his service the supreme end and aim of all our thoughts, words, and actions. To present ourselves to him a holy sacrifice; to glorify him with our bodies and spirits, that are his; to walk in all his commandments and ordinances blameless; whatsoever we do, to do all to his glory, from a regard to his authority, from a sense of our accountableness to him, and from a desire to please him, and to promote his honour and glory among men—this is rendering to him that service which his own exalted nature and the relations which he sustains to us demand.

“Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord.”

2. These duties are strictly compatible, and no way interfering with each other in the due discharge of them.

Diligence in our lawful concerns need not prevent the exercise of our pious affections, and the regular discharge of those duties of prayer and praise which we owe to the infinitely great and glorious Being who made, sustains, and has redeemed us. The affections of the soul may be fixed upon God, and his perfections and mercies may excite our pious love and gratitude, even when we are engaged in the ordinary occupations of life. Our hearts may glow with the fervours of piety—may send up the secret ejaculations of prayer and praise to the God of all goodness and mercy, our strength and our Redeemer—even when we are moving in the circles of business, or enjoying the innocent recreations of life.

This tendency of the soul towards God, this keeping him steadily in our thoughts, this constant study to approve ourselves to him, this earnest desire to obtain his favour, this uniform temper of gratitude and love to him, constitute that fervour of spirit which the apostle enjoins. Whenever the incessant calls of business prevent us from attending to the supreme concern of our relative discharge of the stated duties of public and private devotion, whenever worldly pursuits engross our thoughts and affections so as to weaken the fervour of our pious desires, we may be assured that we are more devoted to the world than is compatible with our religious duties—more devoted to the

world than is due to the perishing, uncertain, and unsatisfying objects of our pursuit—and more devoted to the world than is necessary to our solid advantage or comfort, to the discharge of our duty to those who are dependent on us, or to the gratification of our reasonable wishes. We cannot serve God and mammon. While the pursuits of the world thus occupy our thoughts and affections, while the forming and executing of plans of worldly prosperity constitute the unceasing study and labour of life, we may be lovers of pleasure, we may be votaries of mammon, but we cannot be the servants of God. But when diligence in our worldly concerns is united with pious fervour of spirit, and with a supreme regard to the service of God, then,

3. These duties have an important influence on each other.

Pious fervour of spirit and habitual regard to the authority of God can alone prevent the diligent and assiduous pursuit of the lawful objects of the world from corrupting our souls, and perhaps leading us to the commission of acts which reason and conscience would condemn. He who rises early and sits up late, and eats the bread of carefulness only that his worldly plans may be crowned with success, forgetting God his Maker, the concerns of his salvation, and the service which, as a rational and immortal creature, he owes to the Lord his God, will not be able to resist those powerful temptations, against which there is no safeguard but the fear of God. In him who is not controlled by this holy fear, what security is there, that when the preservation or the acquisition of that wealth to which he is supremely devoted, tempts him to an

act of injustice or dishonesty, his soul will rise superior to the temptation? In him whose bosom never glows with pious love and gratitude to God his Maker, Benefactor, and Redeemer, is there not danger that nobleness of sentiment, that the feelings of generosity and benevolence will become extinct; and that despicable meanness, low cunning, and griping avarice will usurp dominion? The pursuit of gain, independently of the principles and motives that should excite and regulate the pursuit, and of the pious and virtuous objects to which it should be devoted, tends to contract and to corrupt the soul. The passion for it is then only praiseworthy and honourable, when religion controls it, when pious fervour expands its narrow and selfish spirit, when an habitual regard to the service which we owe to God secures us from its numerous and powerful temptations.

On the other hand, diligence in the lawful pursuits of the world is useful, and indeed necessary, to prevent pious fervour of spirit from running into the most dangerous excesses. He who, neglecting his worldly concerns, devotes himself to religious contemplations and exercises, not only violates the divine precept which enjoins him not to be slothful in business, but is in danger of losing the character of an enlightened, sober, consistent Christian, and of becoming an enthusiastic zealot. The objects of religious contemplation are so sublime—God and his perfections, the Saviour and his glories, heaven and its felicities, are objects so ineffably exalted and inspiring, that when the lively affections of the soul are constantly occupied on them, judgment becomes obscured, and reason dethroned. Our unbridled imagination hurries us into all the

lamentable excesses of enthusiasm, or we sink from a height too dazzling for our weak powers, into the vale of dejection, melancholy, and despair. We were formed for the world, its duties, its pursuits, and its innocent joys. To serve the Lord, who made, and who will finally judge us, is indeed the end of our being; and while we fulfil our obligations to him, and keep his service constantly and supremely in view, we shall prevent our diligence in business from quenching our pious fervour, and our pious fervour from leading us to neglect the necessary duties and occupations of life.

Admirable and appropriate, therefore, is the injunction of the apostle—"Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord."

Alas! how many separate duties which ought ever to be united! View that votary of the world, that slave of business, ever alert, ever pressing forward, ever occupied. See you him in the temple of his God? The world is the only temple in which he worships, mammon is the idol which receives all his homage—he has none for the Being who made, and sustains, and who is to judge him. See you him retiring to his closet, to offer his prayers and praises to the Author of his being, the Benefactor of his life? His closet witnesses only his vows of devotion to the world—it is the scene only of worldly cares and concerns. Look into his heart. Glows it with pious fervour, with divine and holy emotions? The love of gain is the supreme passion which has drawn within its corrupting vortex all his powers and affections. What must the end be of such a man? Surely he is not fitted for the presence of his God. What must his end be, but everlasting destruction with that world which he

has made his portion—the bitter pains of eternal death.

Turn your view to an opposite character, more rare indeed, but almost equally hostile to the true Christian spirit. See that misguided zealot. Puffed up with spiritual pride, or deluded by a heated imagination, he looks down upon and denounces the pursuits, and duties, and enjoyments of life. He estimates the power of religion solely by the fervent emotions which it excites in his soul, and not by the effect which it produces on his tempers, his life, and his conversation; and thus devotes his time almost entirely to religious exercises and contemplations, undervaluing, if not neglecting, the social and relative duties of life.

Brethren, be it our care to avoid these dangerous extremes. Let us consider diligence in some lawful pursuit as the law of our nature, the dictate of reason, the command of God. But let us also remember, that pious fervour of spirit, holy love and devotion to the Lord, can alone preserve us from the corrupting power of the world, and qualify us for the enjoyment of our heavenly home. Let us check our immoderate ardour for the things of the world, by the solemn question, which we cannot too often address to ourselves, “What will it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” To serve the Lord, who made, preserves, and redeems us, and thus to secure our eternal salvation, when the world and all that it contains shall have passed away—let this be our supreme concern. In the busy scenes of life, let our hearts ascend in prayer to God for the comforts of his mercy and the guidance of his grace. In the midst of the enjoyments of the world, let

us check our immoderate indulgence in them, by ascending in heart and mind to that heavenly country, where is reserved for the servants of God, a happiness which eye hath not seen, which ear hath not heard, and of which the heart of man cannot conceive. Let us constantly remember, that (to use the expressive language of our liturgy) "we are set in the midst of so many and great dangers, that, by reason of the frailty of our nature, we cannot always stand upright." Let our dependence, therefore, be placed upon that grace, without which we can do nothing. In the language of the liturgy, let us beseech God to grant us such a measure of his grace, that we, running the way of his commandments, may obtain his promises, and be made partakers of his heavenly treasures. "Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit," let us pass the time of our probation on earth in "serving the Lord." Then, though, when we have done all, we shall be unprofitable servants, yet we have the unchanging promise of our gracious God, that, through the merits of our all-prevailing Mediator, an entrance shall be administered unto us, into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

SERMON XXII.

CHRIST RIDING INTO JERUSALEM.

ST. MATTHEW xxi. 10, 11.

And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? And the multitude said, This is Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.

AND, my brethren, were strangers to us and to our religion to appear on this day, for the first time, among us, and to witness the general burst of joy which marks this festive day, and to hear that it was called forth in commemoration of the birth of some celebrated personage, his would be the inquiry which was excited by the advent of Christ to Jerusalem, Who is this? And ours would be the answer of the multitude who accompanied him, of the admiring thousands who hung upon the words that proceeded out of his mouth, of the celestial harbingers of his birth, This is Jesus, the Prophet of Nazareth of Galilee—the Teacher sent from God, who spake as never man spake—the Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.

The individual who comes forward as the Guide and Instructor of mankind, must expect his pretensions to be strictly scrutinized, and his character and qualifications to be brought to the ordeal of severe investigation. Who is this? is a question which not merely idle curiosity, but sober reflection, will prompt. And when the subjects on which

this personage professes to cast the light of truth, respect not physical, intellectual, or political, but religious knowledge—not the evanescent life that now is, not the transitory concerns of the world, but the never-ending existence, the enduring scenes beyond the grave—the claims which he advances to our confidence and submission become infinitely exalted in importance.

Never was the solemn attention of the world called to a personage so interesting as he whose birth we this day commemorate, Jesus, the Prophet of Nazareth of Galilee. In the fulfilment of predictions which, shining with the increasing lustre of ages, had from the beginning marked him as the desire of all nations, and the hope of his chosen people Israel, he appeared, to accomplish the stupendous object from which cherubim and seraphim would have shrunk—to take away sin, to make atonement for transgression, to bring in everlasting righteousness: he appeared, to perform what had hitherto baffled the mightiest efforts of the human intellect, to unbar the prison-house of the grave, and to open the mansions of the eternal world.

And surely every one who reflects that he possesses a spiritual and immortal nature, must instantly feel the earnest and deeply-solicitous desire that a personage, whose errand is so benignant, whose designs of mercy are of such infinite moment, may evidence those qualifications and exhibit those testimonies which would irresistably prove that God is with him.

Let us then with humility and reverence investigate the *personal character* of him who, as at this time, appeared as the divine Messenger of the Father, the *powers* which he exercised, and the *offices*

which he came to execute, and we shall see abundant cause to adore him as the Teacher sent from God—the way, the truth, and the life—the Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.

1. The *personal* character of Jesus Christ.

In one who should claim a divine mission, who should profess to reform the world and to establish a system of religious and moral truth, we should expect to behold exemplified the exalted virtues which he inculcates. Example adorning and enforcing precept, would alone give authority to his instructions, and excite our admiration and our confidence.

In the character of Jesus Christ the expectations of the most scrupulous are fully gratified. The precepts and the spirit of the religion which he inculcated were of the most pure and exalted nature; and this spirit shone forth most resplendently in his character; these precepts, in their uttermost purity and strictness, he uniformly illustrated and enforced in the tenour of his life.

He inculcated humility, meekness, and lowliness, as the most exalted virtues that can adorn the human character. Of these virtues we behold him a perfect model. Born in a manger, and cradling with the beasts of the stall, the example of humility which ushered him into the world, marked every period of his life, and shone forth most illustriously in its close. Wandering without a place to lay his head; not disdaining the society of the refuse of the people, of publicans and sinners, when his object was to administer to their spiritual wants; choosing for his companions, for the friends of his bosom and the heralds of his instructions to the world, those emphatically styled, in the language

of contempt, the fishermen of Galilee; wishing neither the favour of the great nor the splendid gifts of the wealthy, but going about among the children of poverty and affliction, that he might bind up the broken-hearted and comfort those that mourn; when the great work of atonement for man's transgression was to be effected, not shrinking from the agony and infamy of the cross, the punishment of the vilest malefactors; where, among the most perfect of the sons of men, was there one who displayed humility like thine, Saviour of the world? Though thou wast the brightness of the Father's glory, the only-begotten Son who shared the throne of universal dominion, thou didst humble thyself to a life of the deepest suffering, and to a death of agony and infamy.

Jesus Christ inculcated purity, self-denial, and the most active benevolence; and he exhibited in his character and life what his instructions enforced: deceit was not in his tongue, neither was guile found in his mouth. He took up the cross of self-denial, and it sunk him to the grave. In doing good, in relieving the diseased bodies, in saving the guilty souls of men, his heart was unceasingly occupied, his life unceasingly engaged.

He inculcated that perfection of virtue, the forgiveness of injuries; and though persecution assailed him—though his sacred person received the vilest indignities—though by wicked hands he was crucified and slain; prayers were the only reproaches which he poured forth on his murderers—"Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do."

There was not a virtue which can adorn or exalt the human character, which can claim for it admi-

ration, veneration, and love, or which can raise it to a resemblance to the perfection and purity of the divine nature, which shone not forth with transcendent lustre in the character and life of Jesus Christ.

From the character of Christ turn your view to the *powers* which he exercised.

These are the great tests by which we determine his pretensions to divine authority; for how can a man do works obviously and decidedly transcending human power, unless God be with him? Behold, then, this Prophet of Nazareth, commanding and receiving the obedience of universal nature—by a word calming the boisterous tempest—by a word quelling the raging surges of the ocean: hear him speaking the word, and the eyes of the blind are opened, the lame man leaps as a hart, the ears of the deaf are unstopped, the tongue of the dumb sings: behold him entering the domains of death, and raising to life and strength the victims of corruption. Well may we say, Could a man do these miracles, except God were with him?

In regard to these miracles, there could be no deception, no collusion: they were wrought, not in some obscure retreat, but in the face of day—not among a few of his friends and companions, but amidst large assemblages of the people, among his bitter and scrutinizing enemies.

Require we evidence that he wrought these mighty works? The record of them is contained in writings which have been handed down to us from the period of his appearance. As a faithful history of his life and actions, friends and foes both appealed to them. Every possible evidence which authenticates ancient writings, supports them. The

scepticism which rejects them, must reject all historical testimony, and destroy the records of the past transactions of the world.

Are there then any who doubt whether Jesus of Nazareth and his apostles wrought the miracles which have been ascribed to them? How will these sceptics account for a fact which even the early opponents of Christianity attest—the rapid and universal propagation of the Gospel, its establishment on the ruins of that Pagan superstition whose temples were supported by the credulity of the ignorant, the passions of the vicious, and the power of the mighty?

Did the potent sway of wealth, learning, or rank, aid the promulgators of this religion in a system of imposture? They subsisted principally by the work of their hands, or the alms of their followers; they were illiterate fishermen; they rose from among the outcasts of the people.

Did the wealth, the power, and the learning of the world unite to establish and support the religion of Jesus of Nazareth? The wealth, learning, and power of the world combined to crush the disciples of a crucified Galilean, these setters forth of strange gods, these disturbers of the peace of the world.

Did the religion of Jesus and his disciples offer any compromise with the passions of men, hold forth any excitement to his pride, any lure to his passions? Look at this religion and say, whether, to the prejudices and pride of man, many of its doctrines are not revolting; and whether, to his guilty passions, its pure and self-denying precepts are not hateful? So far from conciliating the prejudices, or enlisting in its support the passions of

men, the Gospel of Christ was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness.

Were there any worldly motives which could have induced the disciples of Christ to form or to persevere in a system of imposture? Totally destitute, as ignorant fishermen, of the qualifications and means of imposture, the bonds and imprisonment to which they were soon subject would have arrested them in a course of deception; and it is contrary to reason and nature to suppose that they would have persevered in attesting the death and resurrection of their Master, in constant opposition to their worldly interest, through poverty, persecution, and death.

It is morally impossible that a religion opposed to all the prejudices and passions of mankind, which the arm of wealth and power sought to crush, would have been carried triumphant through the world by a set of illiterate and obscure impostors. Unless Jesus of Nazareth had himself exercised miraculous powers, and had conferred these powers on his disciples, his death would have blasted his designs; and his disciples, who, at this awful event, forsook him and fled, instead of being the illustrious heralds of a religion which shook to its foundations the temple at Mount Zion and overthrew the altars of Pagan idolatry, would have sunk again into obscurity among the fishermen of Galilee.

But if we rejoice that he whose birth we this day celebrate, exhibits, in his personal character and in the works which he performed, the strongest claims to confidence as the divine Messenger of the Father, we shall find these claims powerfully enhanced by the testimony of *prophecy*.

For who but some being commissioned by that

Almighty Jehovah who beholds with one glance the past, the present, and the future, could foretell future and distant events, the most improbable and incredible? Pass by the numerous predictions relative to the Messiah, enlightening, through a long tract of time, the darkness of the world, and at last centering all their rays in Jesus, the Prophet of Nazareth, and contemplate a single prediction which he delivered—the destruction of Jerusalem, the dispersion of the Jews, and their remaining for centuries a despised and persecuted, yet distinct and independent people. The prediction was made—history records, our eyes see its signal fulfilment.

Thus then, my brethren, while the personal character of Jesus of Nazareth, whose birth we this day celebrate, entitles him to our esteem and confidence, the powers which he exercised prove that God was with him—prove that he was, what he professed to be, the Son of God and the Saviour of the world.

2. Our confidence in his divine character and mission will be increased, and our grateful joy confirmed and enlivened, if we contemplate the exalted *offices* which he came to execute.

As a *religious Instructor*. Where, but in the words of him who spake as never man spake, shall we find a full and luminous exhibition of the perfections and will of the eternal Maker and Sovereign of the universe—of those duties by which we must honour and glorify him who has made, who sustains and governs, and who is to judge us—of the duties which our fellow-men claim from us—of those by which we must advance our own perfection and happiness? Where, but in the Gospel of Jesus, the Prophet of Nazareth, shall we find

every pious and moral virtue exalted to the highest purity—illustrated by example, as well as taught by precept—rendered practicable by divine aids, and enforced by everlasting sanctions?

As our gracious *High Priest and Intercessor*. Where, but in that cross, which, by the sufferings and death of him, the Almighty Victim, vindicated to the universe the violated authority of its Almighty Sovereign, is the mystery resolved which so long perplexed and tortured the bosom of guilty man—*how* the punishment of sin, which divine justice demanded, can be reconciled with its pardon, to which divine mercy prompted? Where, but in the merits of him, the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world, can we find the balm which soothes the pains of a guilty conscience, and allays the fears of the troubled bosom? Where, but in him whose mercy is equal to his power, can the guilty obtain a refuge, the weary and heavy-laden an eternal rest? Where, but in the intercession of him who is an all-prevailing Advocate with the Father, can we find a shelter from the penalties of that divine law which we have violated—from the fearful indignation of that justice which, by our transgressions, we have provoked?

As the great *King and Captain of our salvation*. Where, but in that Holy Spirit which he, our divine Redeemer, hath purchased for us, and which he confers in answer to our prayers, which he conveys through the ministrations and ordinances of his church, can we find that light which will disperse from our minds the shades of spiritual darkness—that grace which will subdue in our hearts the sinful dominion of the passions, and in-

vest our souls with those holy virtues which alone can qualify us for the fruition of the divine presence—and that almighty strength which will enable us to overcome the numerous, insidious, and powerful temptations that assail us? Where, but in him, the King of kings and Lord of lords, to whom all power is given in heaven and in earth, shall we find an unfailing refuge amidst the agitations, the changes, and trials of this mortal pilgrimage? Whence, when convulsed in the grasp of our last enemy, shall we draw consolation and support, but from the grace of him who hath passed through the grave and gate of death, to conduct his followers to a joyful resurrection? To whom, indeed, when our souls tremble on the verge of eternity, shall we go but unto thee, blessed Jesus?—thou only hast the words of eternal life—art mighty to save in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment.

At this season, brethren, when the church calls you to celebrate the nativity of your Lord, how can you be more suitably or profitably engaged than in the inquiry that occupied Jerusalem at his advent into it—Who is this? It is Jesus, the Prophet of Nazareth; he whose pure and benevolent *virtues* demand your admiration and love; he whose divine *powers* prove that he is a Teacher sent from God—the Saviour, who is Christ the Lord; he who, in his beneficent and divine *offices*, as that Instructor, that atoning Priest and Intercessor, that Almighty Defender and Ruler, claims your profound homage, your cordial trust, your grateful love, your devoted service.

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the pro-

phets, hath, in these last days, spoken unto us by his Son; and his commandment is, that we believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, mighty to save. On the infinitely momentous subject of their acceptance with God, Jews and Gentiles, the bond and the free, the learned and the ignorant, are all equal; they have but one hope—he who, as at this time, came to save his people from their sins; and who will thus save the humble and penitent, believing in his name, and merits, and power.

See then that ye refuse not him that speaketh; for how many and how infinitely powerful the *claims* which he presents to our homage and our confidence! He is, as an inspired prophet calls him, *Wonderful*, whether we consider the dignity and glory of his nature, the astonishing mystery of his incarnation, or the splendid triumphs of his grace: he is the *Counsellor*—the infinite, eternal, incomprehensible Word, who promulgates the counsels of the Godhead, the messages of divine wisdom: he is the *mighty God*, equal in power and glory with the *everlasting Father*, Jehovah, King of kings and Lord of lords: and he was hailed by adoring seraphs on the morn of his birth—and on the anniversary of this blessed day let us, brethren, thus adore him—as the *Prince of Peace*, the Messenger of glad tidings to a guilty world, speaking *peace*, by the merits of his blood, to the guilty conscience, and calming, by his peaceful and consoling spirit, the agitations of the sinful and troubled soul. “Fairer art thou than the sons of men, O thou most mighty!—grace is poured on thy lips—God hath blessed thee for ever.”

Brethren, let not this sacred festival, which records his deep humiliation, which presents him to us in the garb of poverty and wretchedness, the devoted representative of our guilt and heir of our misery, return, time after time, and still find any of us insensible to the infinite condescensions of his love, unmoved by the solicitations of his mercy, attached solely to the perishing pleasures of the world, and indifferent to those immortal glories which he hath brought down from heaven for us. How inestimable indeed the gift of life and immortality which this Prophet of Nazareth dispenses ! The original sentence of mortality, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return," will be executed upon all the sons of men. That towering strength, which subdues to our dominion the powers of nature, and often marches in horror through the world, will fail at the touch of death. Those ardent desires, which, not confined within the limits of this earth, wing their way through immeasurable space, will sink under the stroke which consigns the breast in which they glow to the embrace of corruption. Those precious sensibilities of the heart which now burn with so bright and pure a flame, will soon be extinguished in the dark, and cold, and silent grave. In that grave already slumber myriads, who were once ardent, active, joyful, like ourselves. Into the awful repose of this house appointed for all the living, we have seen committed, alas ! how many endeared objects of our friendship and affection !—and here, in this gloomy receptacle, will friends and relatives soon, with sorrowing footsteps, consign us. And is this the end of our splendid worldly career—this the termination of our labours and our hopes—to be en-

tombed for ever in the mansions of darkness—to have the worm for our couch, and the earth-worm for our covering? No, brethren; this joyful day celebrates the birth of that Almighty Conqueror, who has subdued to his dominion these dread domains. And if our faith is stayed on him, he will redeem us from death, he will ransom us from the grave. Through the grave and gate of death he will open to us the path of life, and will conduct us to those mansions of glory which he hath gone before to prepare for us. “The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”*

Let, then, every return of this sacred festival, which celebrates the birth of that Saviour who is Christ the Lord, excite in all faithful Christians the emotions of triumphant confidence and grateful adoration.

In his humiliation they witness the most powerful proof of his infinite love for them—in his glorious offices and character they behold the pledges of their salvation. Having devoted themselves to him by lively faith, and serving him in holiness and righteousness, they have secured their interest in the blessings of his redemption. He whom they this day hail as the Son of the Most Highest, is their ever-present and invincible Redeemer. Head over all things to his church, he controls and directs all the events of the world to subserve the good of his people: all the attributes of the Godhead are engaged, faithful Christians, in the person of your Saviour, for your defence, your comfort, and sal-

* Isaiah xxxv. 10.

vation: through his almighty mediation you can approach with boldness the throne of offended justice: in his mercy you can find a refuge from every guilty fear, and every corroding sorrow: his grace will conduct you through all the trials and conflicts of this sinful and weary pilgrimage, to the everlasting repose of his heavenly kingdom. Let then the voice of praise, on this hallowed day, when his reign commenced, ascend to this great King and Captain of your salvation, this everlasting Prince of Peace. Behold, the church invites you to the feast of the holy table, to seal there your vows of grateful love, to devote yourselves anew to that Son of the Father, who, for your sakes, became an infant of days, and bought you with his precious blood. Come, then and in the emotions of penitence commemorate your Saviour sacrificed for you. Come, and in the fervour of devout gratitude adore his surpassing love. Come, humble, faithful, and obedient, and receive the pledges of the mercy and grace of that Saviour who is Christ the Lord; and unite in the song with which the host of heaven proclaimed the glad tidings of his birth—"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

SERMON XXIII.

ABRAHAM OFFERING UP ISAAC.

GENESIS xxii. 10.

And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.

THE appointment of this chapter, containing the history of the command to the patriarch Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, to be read as one of the lessons for this day, is an evidence that our church considers this event as typical of that which she now commemorates—the offering up, by the Almighty Father, of his only Son, as a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

The whole subject is suitable for our contemplations on this day.

Let us then state the history ;

Vindicate it from objections ; and

Urge the ends answered by it.

After the lamentable degeneracy of our first parents, mankind, following the impulse of their wicked imaginations, formed gods unto themselves, and nearly extinguished the knowledge of the Lord, the only living and true God. These wicked and idolatrous nations the Almighty Ruler of the world swept away by a deluge, preserving only Noah and his family. Their descendants soon forgot this mark of the divine indignation, and, like their forefathers before the flood, departed from

the service of the Maker of heaven and of earth. But it pleased God, in the exercise of infinite compassion, not again to punish the idolatrous world. He revealed his name and his perfections to Abraham his servant, whose posterity he designed to make his peculiar people, the depositaries of his word and service, and the centre from which the beams of divine truth might afterwards irradiate the nations. "The Lord said unto Abraham, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee."*

In obedience to this command, the pious patriarch leaves the land of his nativity, encounters the difficulties of a long and toilsome journey, and, under the divine protection, at last dwells securely in the land of Canaan. To him was given the glorious promise, that "in his seed all the families of the earth should be blessed:" and though the blessing of the promised son was long delayed, Abraham continued "strong in faith," being fully persuaded, that what God had promised, he was able also to perform. Isaac, the son of promise, was at length given to his ardent prayers: but severe was the trial, in regard to this son of his affection, to which, in infinite wisdom, he was subjected.

God did "tempt" (that is, try) "Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And God said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt-offering, upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of."† Every circumstance which rendered

* Gen. xii. 1.

† Gen. xxii. 1, 2.

Isaac peculiarly dear to Abraham his father, is here forcibly presented. Isaac, the *only*, the beloved son, the destined comfort of his father's old age, the son in whom was wrapped up the gracious promise of future blessings to the world, was to be sacrificed by the fond father. Exalted the faith which repelled every murmur, and bowed him submissive to the severe command!

“Rising up early in the morning,” Abraham prepares for his journey. Its purpose, in tenderness to the mother of Isaac, the patriarch did not communicate to her; accordingly the preparations which were made indicated only an intention to engage in an act of worship by the burnt-offering of a lamb. Accompanied by Isaac, and two young men bearing wood for the sacrifice, Abraham set out on his journey. On the third day, the place of sacrifice appears afar off: thither Abraham advances with Isaac only, on whom was laid the wood. Supposing that the object of their journey was to worship God by a burnt-offering, and therefore surprised that his father had not prepared a lamb for the purpose, he calls to him, “My father,” and receives the tender reply, “Here am I, my son.” Directing to his father his eager countenance, beaming with innocence, affection, and piety, Isaac solicitously asks, “Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt-offering?” Heart-rending question to the fond father! he could not then summon resolution to announce to Isaac—Thou, my son, art the victim: he piously directs the faith and trust of Isaac to God—“My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt-offering.”

They pursue their journey—they come to the place of sacrifice: the altar is built—the wood is

laid in order—Isaac permits his father to bind him, and to lay him on the wood. What an example of holy submission to the will of God! In obedience to that will, a son consents to lay down his life—a father prepares to be his son's executioner. Behold Abraham by the altar on which was laid, bound, the innocent victim. Isaac looks to heaven for resignation, and then to his father, expecting the fatal stroke. Abraham stretches forth his arm to plunge the knife into the bosom of his son. Unsearchable often thy dispensations, Almighty God, yet ever full of mercy!—delighting not in human victims, thou didst arrest the blow. “The angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven, and said, “Abraham, Abraham; and he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.” What gratitude and joy must have cheered the breast of the patriarch! “He lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold a ram caught in a thicket by its horns: and he went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt-offering instead of his son.”

It is now our business to vindicate this history from objections.

It is asserted that God, who is most merciful, just, and holy, could not approve, much less require, the unnatural act of a parent sacrificing his child. But though, for wise and good purposes, the Sovereign Ruler of the universe required this act in the case of Abraham, he did not permit it to be consummated: he restored Isaac, the destined victim, to the embrace of his afflicted father, with

his virtue more exalted, and therefore more worthy of parental love, by the noble fortitude and resignation which he had displayed. God restored him, too, with renewed and gracious blessings. "By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me, that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand upon the sea-shore—and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice."

But if God had required from Abraham the *actual* sacrifice of his son, who will presume to arraign the sovereign authority of the Creator over the creatures of his hand? We hold our life as a free gift from him, and he may take it away in whatever mode and at whatever time he pleases. He who gave to Abraham the promised blessing—a son, in his old age—might have required that, for infinitely wise and good purposes, he should be offered up by his father, a holy sacrifice to the God that made him. Nor would this act have authorized the barbarous custom of the Heathen in immolating their children on the altars of their false gods. Theirs was a superstitious, unauthorized homage to imaginary deities, whom their corrupt fancy clothed with every detestable vice and passion. The sacrifice of Isaac was an exalted act of holy obedience to the living God, the ever-blessed Jehovah, who, by his visible presence, convinced Abraham of the reality of the command. But let it be remembered that Isaac was not sacrificed, and that the goodness of God shines with the brightest lustre in the glorious blessings with which he rewarded the faith

of his servant. Abraham considered the command, not as the mandate of an arbitrary Sovereign, but as the requisition of a righteous and merciful Parent. He was unshaken in his conviction, that however dark and mysterious was the requisition to sacrifice his son, the reasons for it were infinitely wise and good. This was the faith which inspired Abraham with fortitude and strength to resolve to sacrifice his son: it was a faith grounded, not on the apparent reasonableness of the command, but on his obligations and duty to obey the Almighty Being, his Maker, Preserver, and Benefactor, who prescribed it.

And infinitely wise and good were the *ends* accomplished by the command to Abraham to sacrifice his son.

I. The faith of the holy patriarch was thus confirmed and exalted.

The merit of obedience is always in proportion to the number and greatness of the obstacles to be overcome. That faith which overcomes the strongest principles of human nature, and the most tender feelings of the heart, is the most exalted and meritorious. Such was the faith of Abraham, evidenced by his readiness to sacrifice his son. He bound his tenderly-beloved son on the altar—he made bare the bosom in which to plunge the knife. More entire submission to the will of God, founded on confidence in his divine perfections and his right to command, could not be exhibited, than that which was here displayed. Jehovah himself set his seal to the faith and virtue of his servant—“Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me.”

II. By this command to Abraham he became an instructive and glorious example to the people of God in all future ages.

Piety and virtue shed instruction and pleasure on all who behold them; they live in the benefits which they have diffused, and in the unworthy whom they may have reclaimed, long after their possessor is numbered with the dead; and they live in the sacred page of history, to instruct, reprove, and reform the latest generations. Happy, then, the man, whose virtue, eminently tried, and therefore eminently illustrious, becomes an instructive and blessed example to the world! Severe was the sacrifice which Abraham was called to make; but his holy submission, his unreserved obedience, his vigorous and unshaken faith, have not only made him eternally blessed, but have exalted him at the head of the faithful servants of the living God; and his example the servants of God, in all ages, are called to imitate. But,

III. By this trial of his faith, both he and his posterity had a lively view and assurance of the plan of redemption through the promised Messiah.

Among the nations of the East, it was common to communicate information by signs and actions expressive of things and events. Many instances of this language of signs occur in the Old Testament, particularly in the prophetic books. When Isaiah was to foretell the captivity of Egypt and Ethiopia, he loosed the sackcloth from off his loins, and put off the shoe from his foot, and walked naked, (that is, without the rough garments which the prophets wore;) by this expressive action declaring that the Ethiopians and Egyptians should

be led captive, and barefoot. To denote the subjection into which God would bring the nations whom Nebuchadnezzar would conquer, the prophet Jeremiah made bonds, and put them on his neck. And among a variety of instances, more common in Ezekiel than in any of the other prophets, to denote the captivity of Israel, he was directed by God to bring out the furniture of his house in the sight of all the people, signifying that in this manner they should be removed, and go into captivity. This language of signs, indeed, was common among the Eastern nations, from the earliest times. The Deity therefore, who, in a revelation to any person or people, would adopt that mode which would be most expressive and intelligible, in order to inform Abraham and his posterity of the plan of redemption through the death of the promised seed, commanded the patriarch to sacrifice his son. By this transaction the mystery of redemption was laid open to the view of the patriarch. The poignancy of his own feelings when about to sacrifice Isaac, would assist him to form some estimate of the surpassing love of God to man, by giving up, to suffering and death, his only-begotten and well-beloved Son. In the resignation and submission of the innocent Isaac were portrayed the meek readiness and patience with which the Lamb of God sustained the griefs and carried the sorrows of guilty man. Isaac bore the wood on which he was bound a victim: Jesus carried the cross on which he suffered an atoning sacrifice for sin. In the restoration of Isaac as it were from the dead, was prefigured the resurrection of Christ from the grave, after having expiated sin. And in the gracious blessing which God bestowed upon Isaac,

was denoted his merciful acceptance of the complete sacrifice which the Messiah would make for the sins of the world. In the mournful scene which wrung the heart of the patriarch, he beheld the glorious plan of redemption through the promised Messiah—that redemption which was faintly foretold in the promise, that the seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent. In the bitter grief and agony which the giving up of his own son occasioned, the astonishing goodness of God, in sparing not the Son of his bosom, appeared worthy of unutterable praise and love.

It was not to Abraham only that the command to sacrifice Isaac displayed the plan and mystery of redemption: it was handed down, as a type and assurance of that event, to the nation of the Jews: and to us, at this day, it is in some measure an evidence that the promised Messiah, thus typified in Isaac, has indeed visited us in Christ the Lord.

Let us learn from this history,

1. To adore the goodness of God in the trial of his servants.

He tried the faith of Abraham, that it might become more exalted and illustrious. He tries the faith of his servants, in every age, with the same gracious purpose. It is not to sport with the creatures of his hand, or to display his resistless sovereignty and power, that he assails us with calamity—that he separates from us those most dear to us—that he often places us in situations most critical and trying. No; “like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth those that fear him.” It is to purify his people from the dross of infirmity and sin, and to perfect them in that holy and entire subjection to his will, which is their highest happi-

ness—it is that their faith, vanquishing every enemy, and triumphing over every temptation, may finally obtain a crown of glory that shall never fade away—that he tries them sometimes “seven times in the fire.” What force and propriety, then, in the exhortation of the apostle—“Count it all joy, brethren, when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trial of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”

2. Let us learn to adore the goodness of God in the aids and motives to virtue which he affords us in the example of holy men.

Precepts, however strong and animating, speak not to the heart with that persuasion and energy as example. Religion is displayed, in example, in all her dignity and sweetness. When we contemplate her as portrayed by the sacred writers, as delineated in the law of God, she appears in such perfection and purity, that we may be led to suppose that she does not leave heaven, her blest abode, to dwell among frail and sinful mortals. But when we contemplate the examples, exhibited in Scripture, of holy men, we are induced to acknowledge that religion was designed for man, as his perfection and happiness; that truly she “rejoiceth in the habitable parts of the earth, and her delights are with the sons of men.” By these holy men the law of God was fulfilled in its extent and purity, and his statutes rejoiced their hearts. We see those who, “through faith, subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises.” And what they have done by the grace of God, we can do also. “Encompassed by so great a cloud of

witnesses," it behoves us "to lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us, and to run with patience the race which is set before us."* We have reason then to praise God, that, to the holy instructions of his word, the awful calls of his threatenings, the enlivening influences of his promises, the invigorating and quickening operations of his Spirit, he has added the animating example of the faithful, to "awaken us from the death of sin to the life of righteousness," and to direct, strengthen, and console us in our Christian course.

But let us remember, that, without the virtues of the faithful servants of God, we cannot expect to inherit their reward: let us remember, that theirs were lives of ardent devotion, triumphant faith, and holy resignation. The same glorious perfection of piety is attainable by us. Yes; exalted as was the faith of Abraham, it is required of every Christian, not in the particular instance to sacrifice an only son, but in an entire surrender of his will, his affections, and his whole life, to the holy will of God. Studying and meditating on the example of the faithful, and excited by the grace of God to a holy emulation of them, after being made perfect through faith and patience, we shall be thought meet to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God.

3. Let us, in unreserved trust and submission to God, receive with humility whatever he has revealed.

This was the conduct of Abraham. When he received the command to sacrifice Isaac, he did

* Heb. xii. 1.

not hesitate, but instantly prepared to obey. "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth to him good," was doubtless his language. Worthy his conduct of our imitation! That pride of reason which rejects every truth that cannot be measured by its imperfect standard, is reconcileable neither with the modesty and sincerity of the inquirer after truth, nor with the humility and piety of the Christian. Impressed with a sense of the imperfection and frailty of reason, and firmly trusting in the unsearchable wisdom and infinite goodness of the Maker and Ruler of the universe, let us believe with humility whatever God has revealed, and obey, without a murmur, whatever he commands. He is our heavenly Father and Friend; he has revealed as much as is for our present good to know; he suffers no evil nor care to assail us which is not designed in tender mercy; his goodness, therefore, should lead us to repentance, and to devote ourselves to his service. Then we may cherish that full confidence in his favour which will light up comfort in the darkest night of sorrow. It was this confidence which cheered and animated the patriarch Abraham in the severe trial which he was called to sustain. Let us love and obey God, and all things shall work together for our good. The sorrows and trials of this mortal life shall soon pass away, and we shall enter on the fulness of bliss in God's presence.

Finally. Let us endeavour, from this history, to estimate the infinite love of God towards us, in giving up his only-begotten and well-beloved Son to suffering and death for our redemption.

Infinitely removed indeed is Jehovah, the eternal Spirit, from human passions; but every virtuous

affection exists in him, in a perfection, purity, and strength inconceivable by us. Inconceivably perfect, pure, and strong, therefore, was the love which, in the incomprehensible Godhead, subsisted between the Father and the Son; yet this Son God the Father gave, not to take upon him the nature of angels, but of fallen man—gave, not to ease, and splendour, and power, but to pain, suffering, and death, for us and our salvation. Well may this be considered as an evidence of the surpassing love of God for us; well may the apostle say—"God *so* loved the world, as to give his only-begotten Son." Let us then with reverence labour to conceive what were the holy emotions of the ever-blessed God, when he gave up his only Son to the bitter agonies of the cross. In the case of Isaac, death was the penalty which he must sustain as a sinner; but the Son of God, who knew no sin, sustained this penalty. The death which Isaac was called to sustain, was not a death of ignominy, nor of more than ordinary pain; but the death of Christ was that of the vilest malefactor, aggravated by insults, and scoffs, and reviling—it was a death embittered by the sense of the sins of the whole world—by the dereliction of his Father's presence and favour: yet to this death did God the Father give his only Son—this death did the Son, partaker of the glory of the Godhead, sustain—and let it be remembered—for *us*. Human conception fails fully to realize this mystery of infinite love. But how aggravated must be the guilt, how dreadful the condemnation of those that disregard it—that neglect a salvation prompted by the love of God the Father, wrought by the love of God the Son! To

Him, then, that loved us, and gave himself for us, let us, in the devotion of our hearts and the obedience of our lives, as well as in the homage of our lips, ascribe all honour, and praise, and glory, for ever and ever.

SERMON XXIV.

THE LAMB OF GOD.

ISAIAH liii. 7.

He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter.

THE striking and appropriate terms in which the prophet Isaiah depicts the character and offices of the Messiah, have procured for him, by way of eminence, the title of the Evangelical Prophet. He exhibits a glowing but faithful picture of the character of Christ, and all the humiliating and all the triumphant events of his life. In the chapter which contains my text, the prophet has dipped his pencil in the softest colours, and draws a portrait of the Saviour, which, while it conveys to us the most exalted ideas of his character, is calculated to awaken our tenderest and liveliest sympathy.

Let us then contemplate the character of Christ, as delineated by the prophet under the emblem of “a lamb brought to the slaughter,” that our penitence may be awakened, our gratitude enlivened, and our souls warmed with the ardent emotions of love and duty.

Under the character of a “lamb brought to the slaughter,” we are led to consider,

The *innocence* of Christ ;

His *tenderness* and compassion ;

His *patience* ;

And, finally, to consider him as the *victim for our sins*.

1. We are led to consider his *innocence*.

Pure was that spirit which envy never corroded, which malice never inflamed, which pride never agitated, which deceit never contaminated, which lust never corrupted. "A lamb" indeed was he, "without blemish and without spot." His Godhead sanctified his human nature, and purified it from all the stains of sin. His soul glowed innocent and pure as the glory which emanates from the infinite Source of all perfection. No reproaches, no insults, no persecutions could move him from his steadfast purposes of love, or excite any dispositions but those of compassion. Abuse and injury served but to inflame the fervour of his love, even for those who thus requited his benevolent exertions. No homage could rouse his ambition, no persecutions excite his revenge. Uncontaminated by any vengeful passion, his soul was the seat of innocence and peace. He passed through the world sedulous and faithful in the discharge of all its duties, mixing with its most busy circles, but infinitely removed from the influence of its vices and its corrupting pleasures. That life could not be otherwise than innocent, which was supremely and uniformly devoted to the disinterested purpose of advancing the temporal and eternal interests of those he came to save.

And how pure and renovating the *laws* which he enjoined!—calculated, by the exalted virtues which they enforce, to restore us to the innocence and virtue of heaven.

Behold then the Lamb of God, clothed with *innocence* celestial and divine, infusing into his life, and into his precepts, the purity which glowed in his own immaculate soul. Most worthy is he surely

of our admiration, our esteem, our ardent love. What excuse can there be for the apathy which beholds with indifference this exalted worth? What can save from the stigma of hardened impiety, the heart which views with indifference or contempt the infinitely pure and exalted innocence of the Lamb of God?

And yet this is the condition of sinners. They regard the holy Jesus, whose character should awaken all the emotions of esteem and love, with indifference. They bestow on the character of him who, in every pure and holy attribute, infinitely transcends all human excellence, perhaps not a moment's thought. They hear this immaculate Lamb of God profaned and contemned without emotion, and even unite in the unholy profanation. Perhaps by his innocent and sacred name they seal their thoughtless and frivolous assertions, or impious falsehoods. He whose exalted and disinterested virtue, whose inoffensive and spotless innocence should awaken their most ardent and tender feelings, possesses no place in their thoughts, no share in their affections. They reproach him, they insult him, they put him to an open shame by their irregular and vicious life. Oh! the immaculate innocence of the Lamb of God awfully aggravates the guilt of those who thus neglect and despise him.

The emblem under which the prophet represents the Messiah, leads us to contemplate,

2. His *tenderness* and compassion.

Behold him ever engaged in alleviating and removing human misery, and delighting to gladden the hearts which sorrow and affliction had smitten.

Hear him, by reproof, by warning, by affectionate persuasion, seeking to awaken and reclaim secure and obdurate sinners. See him weeping over that impenitence which resisted his importunate solicitations. Hear him pressing, in the accents of mercy, penitent mourners to come unto him, and be partakers of his peace. Behold him always forgetting his own sufferings, in the prosecution of his benevolent work of effecting the redemption of man, and at the moment so awful to frail nature, when his soul was sinking in a dark and terrible death, forgetting his bitter agonies in the prayer for the pardon of his murderers.

And in this infinite tenderness and compassion of the Saviour, the Lamb of God, does there appear no claim on our gratitude and love, no reproach on that insensibility which disregards or contemns his infinite compassion?

Was it an austere, cruel, and unmerciful Judge against whom we rebelled—did a Master claim our service, who had evidenced no wish for our happiness, and conferred no favours upon us—our neglect and disregard might find some excuse. But to remain unaffected by the infinite tenderness of the Lamb of God—to reject mercy forced on us by the earnest and affectionate persuasions of our compassionate Lord—to disregard and condemn that merciful Redeemer who is constantly imploring blessings upon us, and warding off, by his intercessions, the stroke of incensed justice—is a tremendous guilt, which no excuses can palliate, and which human colouring cannot aggravate.

In the emblem of the lamb led to the slaughter, we are called to view,

3. The *patience* of the Saviour—

Patience which bore without murmuring a series of reproaches, persecutions, and sufferings, more severe and painful than human imagination can conceive—patience which sustained unexampled injuries and insults with meek resignation, and returned them with blessings instead of revilings—patience which now bears with the provocations and scorn of sinners, still offering them pardon, still interceding for them, still beseeching them to be reconciled unto God. Yes; the patient Lamb of God endured the most agonizing sufferings with the humble prayer of resignation—“‘The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?’”* “‘Father, not my will, but thine be done.’”† He always implored blessings on the persecuting hand that smote him; and even now, seated in the heavens as the King of kings and Lord of lords, he answers the contempt, the blasphemies, the scorn of impenitent sinners, with offers of his mercy and his grace.

Behold him then the *patient* Lamb of God, and let us ask ourselves, what a debt of gratitude do we owe to that patience which encountered such severe sufferings for our sakes, and which could not be intimidated from the consummation of the glorious work of our redemption by the awful sufferings and agonies which were to mark its close? To what but to the long-suffering patience of the Lamb of God, as our Mediator and Intercessor, do we owe the day of grace which we now enjoy, our escape from the punishments which our sins have merited, and the access which is permitted us to the throne of our Almighty Sovereign and Judge?

* John xviii. 11.

† Luke xxii. 42.

Behold then Jesus, the Lamb of God, innocent and tender, sustaining the burden of our sins—suffering the most severe pains of poverty, contempt, and persecution—assailed by the revilings, the buffetings, the scourgings of unfeeling and wicked men—and not a murmur escapes from him. He bears the accumulated sufferings which pressed upon him, with composure, with cheerfulness, with ardour—bears them, not to obtain blessings for himself, but to effect the deliverance and salvation of sinful man. And shall we, whose sins caused these sufferings, we, who are the subjects of all these blessings, behold this exalted exhibition of disinterested patience without being overwhelmed with the emotions of gratitude for his patient and enduring love, without being penetrated with compunction for our transgressions? For,

4. He was the “Lamb brought to the slaughter,” the atoning *victim for our sins*.

He was that Lamb without spot and without blemish, on whom were laid the iniquities of us all—the true Paschal Lamb, whose blood, sprinkled on the soul by faith, saves us from the wrath of eternal justice. Of this divine Lamb, the lambs offered in sacrifice in the Jewish law were all typical. From the merits of the precious blood of this Lamb, once shed for many, the legal sacrifices, by anticipation, derived all their atoning efficacy.

Considering Christ as a sacrifice for sin, how appropriate his appellation of the Lamb of God! Pure from the stains of guilt, possessing, not merely spotless, but divine innocence, infinitely availing is the sacrifice of his death. As the Lamb of God, Jesus was indeed led to the slaughter: he was

wounded for our sins, he was bruised for our iniquities. Innocent and holy, he suffers for offences not his own. *His blood was shed for us*—and shall it be in vain? His atoning sacrifice for our sins is all-sufficient—and shall we refuse to avail ourselves of this inestimable benefit? Exposed to the just displeasure of our Almighty Sovereign, shall we cast from us that atoning blood which, in his mysterious but merciful appointment, seals our pardon? Defiled by iniquity, shall we reject that precious blood which is infinitely powerful to cleanse us from all sin?

Behold, then, impenitent sinners! behold the Lamb of God, the sacrifice for your sins, and be affected with a deep sense of their guilt and enormity, be penetrated with lively contrition for them. Let gratitude for his infinite compassion be united with the emotions of penitence. Let the humble but fervent exercises of holy faith be excited by the prevailing efficacy of his precious blood. Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world—behold him with the eye of penitential, and lively, and holy faith, and receive rest to your souls.

Christians, let the Lamb of God be ever before you, the object of your contemplations, the source of your penitence, the theme of your praises, the pattern of your conduct. While from the mysterious but all-powerful efficacy of his blood you derive your pardon, your qualifications for eternal felicity must consist in your conformity to the meek and holy graces which he possessed. If you have not his spirit, you are none of his.

Remember, this Lamb of God was *innocent* and holy, infinitely removed from all sin. Be ye then

perfect, even as he was perfect. Carry with you, as the constant pattern of your conduct, his blameless life. Strive to act, in every situation, as you think your pure and inoffensive Redeemer would have acted. Be, like him, wholly separate from sin. Followers of a Master so innocent, avoid even the appearance of evil; and cherish, by the aids of his Holy Spirit, those divine virtues which will assimilate you to his image, and fit you to be partakers of his everlasting glories.

Behold his *tenderness*—and remember, your tempers and dispositions must be like his. Disciples of a Redeemer whose soul glowed with infinite compassion, who was constantly engaged in alleviating human misery, whose gentle spirit never caused a moment's unnecessary pain, whose compassionate voice was ever seeking to sooth and comfort the afflicted, who, in the exercise of mercy unequalled and infinite, poured forth his soul unto death for the sinful and rebellious race of man—with this bright and exalted pattern of tenderness and mercy before you, how great will be your guilt, Christians, if you cherish a harsh, unkind, and unforgiving spirit! Let the tender compassion of your Lord dwell in your hearts. His tender compassion for you bore him through all his unexampled sufferings, and sustained him upon the cross. No return that you can make can be in any degree adequate to this love. He demands of you that you exercise tenderness and compassion towards your brethren. Prove, then, by your meek and gentle tempers, by your active and disinterested zeal in alleviating and comforting human sorrow, that you are indeed the true disciples of the Lamb of God.

Behold his *patience*. Can more bitter revilings, more piercing injuries, more severe persecutions, or deeper sufferings, assail you than those which he sustained, not only without a murmur, but in the exercise of the most exalted acts of kindness towards his persecutors? Christians, when disposed to resent the revilings, injuries, and persecutions to which you are exposed, look to your reviled and persecuted, but forgiving Lord. When fretful and impatient under distress and affliction, seat yourselves at the foot of the cross of your Redeemer, and learn resignation from the suffering but patient Lamb of God.

Finally. Behold him the *victim for your sins*.

Here, Christians, is the source of your most exalted hopes, and your most important duties. The Victim for your sins is all-sufficient: the mysterious blood of the Lamb of God, shed upon the cross, has appeased the wrathful claims of divine justice. United to this divine and Almighty Saviour by a true and living faith, you have not any thing to fear from the demands of that divine law which you have violated. Your souls are at peace; and through the power of your Saviour's merits and grace, you can call God your Father. Ascribe all the glory and praise of these exalted blessings to that Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. Keep steadily in view the cross on which he suffered, the victim for your sins. Behold there your guilt in the infinite sacrifice that atoned for it, and be penitent and humble. Let the wonders of redeeming mercy which it displays, awaken your love, inflame your gratitude, strengthen and animate your holy zeal. Derive from the cross, on which the Lamb of God

made full atonement for your sin, all your consolations and your hopes for time and eternity. God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Under the symbols of the bread broken and the wine poured out upon the altar, you may behold the Lamb of God bruised and slain for your sins. And the church calls you, on the approaching festival that commemorates the resurrection of Him who once died, but now liveth for ever, to celebrate the infinite condescensions of his love. You are called spiritually to feed, by lively faith, on his body broken and blood shed, that you may partake of his mercy, and be nourished by his grace unto everlasting life. Seated at the table which his mercy spreads, as an all-sufficient and merciful Redeemer, Jesus addresses the accents of tender compassion—"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."* Brethren, the invitation is addressed to you; for, sinful, guilty, and doomed to death, from the divine fountain only, which is opened in the merits and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, can you derive health, and salvation, and life. Place then your trust in him, as that Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. Faithfully devoting yourselves to his service, you shall enjoy the consolations of his mercy, and the unfailing and almighty protection of his grace; and finally you shall be admitted to the kingdom of the once-suffering, but now highly exalted and triumphant Saviour; and there, with

* Isaiah lv. 1.

angels and archangels, and all the company of heaven, celebrate the everlasting festival of love; ascribing blessing, and honour, and glory, and power to him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb that was slain to redeem you by his blood.

SERMON XXV.

THE CONTEST AND VICTORY OF EMMANUEL.

ISAIAH lxiii. 1—6.

Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the wine-fat? I have trodden the wine-press alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury, and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in my heart, and the year of my redeemed is come. And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me; and my fury, it upheld me. And I will tread down the people in mine anger, and make them drunk in my fury, and I will bring down their strength to the earth.

WITHIN the whole compass of language, no passage can be produced more truly eloquent and sublime than these glowing words of the evangelical prophet. He presents to our view a severe and bloody conflict, in which a personage most glorious and exalted is introduced as the principal actor; and the tremendous effects of his power and anger are displayed in the total destruction of his enemies. This scene is exhibited in language highly figurative, with imagery awfully just and appropriate, calculated to awaken the varied emotions of astonishment and sympathy, of terror and of triumph.

Independently of its evangelical meaning, the

passage cannot be read without those feelings of awe and pleasure which the truly sublime never fails to excite. But when we consider the evangelical prophet as describing, in these words, the glorious character and the deep humiliation and sufferings of the Messiah—as depicting the splendid victories by which he achieved our redemption, and the terrible vengeance which he will execute on his impenitent adversaries—this sublime passage assumes infinite interest; and the scene which it unfolds, excites the emotions of the most profound reverence and adoration. The evangelical strain of the prophet, who seems never for a moment to take his enraptured view from the promised Child that was to be born, and the Son that was to be given—the elevated grandeur and sublimity of the epithets, which are weakened and degraded when applied to a personage and event less glorious than the Saviour and his redemption—justify this application of the passage.

Our church, by appointing the chapter in which these words are contained, as part of the epistle for Monday in this holy week, consecrated, from the earliest ages of Christianity, to the commemoration of the passion and crucifixion of our Lord, refers the event exhibited in this passage to that victory which, by his sufferings and death, he achieved over our spiritual enemies. Your time, therefore, cannot be more suitably employed than in considering the evangelical meaning of these sublime words.

It is necessary to remark, that though some of the declarations in this passage, which the prophet puts into the mouth of the Messiah, have a future aspect, yet the evident meaning and connexion of

the various parts of it require that they should be rendered in the past time; and the original justifies this rendering. The scene is under the form of a dialogue, which increases its spirit and sublimity.

The Messiah is introduced as an Almighty Conqueror returning triumphant from the slaughter of his foes, and awakening in those who behold him the emotions of astonishment and awe; and they burst forth in the inquiry—"Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah?" Bozrah was a city of Edom, a country, the inhabitants of which had been distinguished for their inveterate enmity to the Jews; and it is usual with the prophets to distinguish the enemies of Christ and his church by the names of nations who were adversaries of Israel, God's peculiar people, whom he had selected to be the depositaries of his laws and truths until the promised seed should come, who should be for salvation to the ends of the earth. The Messiah therefore, returning in "dyed garments" from the conflict with the enemies of man's salvation, is represented as coming from Edom and Bozrah.

The majesty and splendour of his appearance excite still further astonishment and awe.

"This that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength."

The appearance of the Conqueror was suited to the dignity of his character, to the irresistible might of his dominion, and to the infinitely important achievements in which he had been engaged. He "travels in the greatness of his strength," bearing dismay and defeat amongst all his enemies, and bringing victory and salvation to his faithful followers.

How applicable is this description to our Almighty Redeemer ! Though poverty and persecution marked his suffering life—though, considered as the representative of our guilt, he had “no form nor comeliness, no beauty that we should desire him”—though, in his state of humiliation, “he was despised and rejected of men ; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief”—yet the glory of the Godhead shone with refulgent light through this cloud of sorrow. To the eye of faith, he appeared “fairer than the children of men,” “the brightness of the Father’s glory, and the express image of his person,” “the chief among ten thousand, altogether lovely.” The divine virtues which from his sacred person diffused lustre, were like “the glorious apparel” which commanded astonishment and admiration. When he nailed sin to his cross—when he entered the strong holds of the adversary and routed his forces—when, marching through the domains of death, he led captivity captive—our glorious Redeemer returned from the conquest “travelling in the greatness of his strength.”

By this sublime introduction we are prepared for the delineation of the almighty power of the divine Conqueror.

The question having been asked, “Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah ? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength ?” the personage himself returns the answer :

“I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save.”

He was not a victor who, swayed by the spirit of ambitious domination, sought renown in devastation and carnage ; who, setting at defiance justice and mercy, stretched his relentless sceptre over

oppressed nations. Unlike the conquerors of the world, the Saviour, gentle, meek, and lowly, directed his almighty power only against the adversaries of God and man. He sought to "bring down the proud and lofty, and to exalt the humble and meek." "He spake in righteousness:" in righteousness did he proclaim his laws; in righteousness did he establish his dominion; in righteousness does he exercise his sway; and according to the eternal rules of righteousness will he finally distribute the rewards and punishments of his kingdom. "Mighty is he to save;" not indeed from the yoke of temporal power, not from the bondage of worldly oppression; for his "kingdom is not of this world:" "mighty is he to save" from the bondage of sin and Satan, from the sway of unholy passions, more severe and humiliating than the yoke of the oppressor. For this purpose he is armed with the power of the Godhead: he is head over all things to his church, and ready to dispense all those blessings which, as sinful and mortal creatures, we can require. We are therefore called to render him the profound homage of faith and obedience; for "all power is given to him in heaven and on earth." "He hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords."

The splendid garments of this Almighty Conqueror were stained with blood. The inquiry, therefore, from those who behold his coming, naturally arises—

"Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the wine-fat?"

Dyed were his celestial garments, as if he had been treading the fat where the wine is pressed from the broken grape.

The glorious personage who is addressed, himself replies :

“ I have trodden the wine-press alone ; and of the people there was none with me : for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury, and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in my heart, and the year of my redeemed is come.”

The Conqueror had been engaged in a severe and dreadful combat. The wrath of his enemies came mightily upon him, and bruised him, as if he had been trodden down in a wine-press. Alone and unsupported, he sustained the shock of his foes. But he rose victorious from the conflict, hurling destruction on his enemies. He sprinkled their “ blood upon his garments, and stained his raiment.” In that “ day of vengeance,” when he came to achieve the deliverance of his faithful followers, his anger and his fury burst forth, and he “ trod down the people,” and trampled them under his victorious feet.

What a forcible and awful picture of the achievements of Jesus Christ, the glorious King and Captain of our salvation ! Beholding him in the day of his humiliation and suffering, we are astonished that “ his visage is marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men.” The blood which stains the garments of a Saviour so meek, so lowly, so gentle, may well excite our astonishment. He accounts for his mysterious appearance : “ I have trodden the wine-press alone.” As the grape is bruised in the wine-press by the weight of the mill-stone, so was I crushed by the wrath of God due to the sins of a guilty world.

“Alone,” without support, without sympathy, without comfort, I sustained the inflictions of divine justice. “Of the people there was none with me.” Even those for whom I was enduring those dreadful agonies, refused me their compassion. The chosen companions of my toils and labours, in this dark hour, forsook me and fled. In vain did I invoke the pity of those who surrounded the cross on which I was encountering the agonies of an ignominious death: “Is it nothing to you all, ye that pass by?” Mockery and insult answered the cries of anguish which burst from my soul. Even my Almighty Father, in this hour of misery, withdrew from me the ineffable consolations of his countenance, and directing his justice against me, as the representative of rebellious man, cast upon me his wrathful frown. “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Oh! was there any sorrow like unto my sorrow wherewith the Lord afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger? But in the counsels of the eternal Godhead, as the Redeemer of man, I was to achieve, through suffering and death, his salvation. The hour of my death, therefore, became the hour of my triumph: it was the consummation of the degrading scene of my humiliation, during which “I was smitten of God and afflicted; was wounded for the transgressions and bruised for the iniquities of my people.” Thus, “through the suffering of death, I became crowned with glory and honour:” the ignominious cross was changed into the throne of almighty power and dominion: yes, from the wine-press in which, crushed by the arm of divine justice, I satisfied to the uttermost its inexorable claims, I arose, arrayed with the “garments of vengeance for clothing, and

with zeal as with a cloak." On your foes, sin, and death, and Satan, who held you captive, I hurled the thunder of my power; I sunk them in the wine-press of my wrath; I trampled them in my fury; their blood I sprinkled on my garments, with their blood I stained my raiment. To accomplish your redemption, I thus went forth in the greatness of my power, conquering and to conquer. Mercy hushed her pleadings; for the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year of my redeemed had come.

In the succeeding verses, the Messiah still further displays the wonders of his redeeming power, his glorious triumphs over all the adversaries of our salvation.

"I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me; and my righteousness, it upheld me. And I will tread down the people in mine anger, and make them drunk in my fury, and I will bring down their strength to the earth."

The miserable race of man were in captivity to sin and Satan—cut off from communion with their God, the fountain of life and happiness—obnoxious, through transgression, to his justice. "I looked, and there was none to help; I wondered that there was none to uphold." None of the innumerable myriads of created spirits, however deeply they might compassionate, could restore fallen man. His guilt, incurred by transgressions committed against an infinite God, was also infinite, and required an infinite atonement. The holy law of the Creator of the world had been violated; its everlasting penalties must be sustained. The au-

thority of the Sovereign of angels and of man had been insulted; an all-perfect reparation was necessary. Imperfection would tarnish the most exalted obedience, and defeat the boldest efforts of the highest angelic spirit; among the host of heaven none, therefore, could be found able to render that perfect obedience, that infinite atonement, which the contemned authority and justice of God exacted. Man was sinking under the vengeance of his Almighty Judge: prompted by infinite and ineffable compassion, the eternal Son of the Father undertook that infinitely arduous office, to which the most perfect seraph was unequal: he resolved to encounter and satisfy the claims of divine holiness, and in the person of man to sustain the tremendous inflictions of divine justice. He resolved, and he effected our redemption; his own arm brought salvation unto him: his omnipotent power enabled him to achieve our redemption, and to bring in everlasting righteousness: "his fury, it upheld him." Roused to holy indignation against the enemies of man's salvation, "he trod them down in his anger, he made them drunk in his fury, he brought down their strength to the earth," binding them in chains at his victorious feet, and emptying into their souls the cup of his fury, which, like an intoxicating draught, prostrated their strength, and brought them to the earth. Victorious over all his enemies, he reigns, the dispenser of life, health, and salvation to a fallen world.

Thus have I endeavoured to exhibit to you the awful and sublime import of this evangelical passage.

The first impressions which the contemplation

of it is calculated to excite, are those of profound reverence and admiration of the glorious character and offices of Christ.

An omnipotent Conqueror returning victorious from the combat, glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength; speaking in righteousness; mighty to save; the day of vengeance in his heart; treading down the people in his anger, making them drunk in his fury; achieving salvation by his victorious arm—it is not in the power of language to convey to us more awfully sublime ideas of the divine power of Christ, and of the fulness and glory of his redemption, as well as of the exterminating terrors of his justice. To suppose that an inspired prophet would apply these divine epithets to the victories of a frail and sinful man, would be to impute to him absurd and criminal impiety. The divine nature of the Saviour alone justifies this glorious representation of him: the divine nature of the Saviour alone constitutes an unfailing ground of confidence and hope that he is mighty to save. The exhibition which the prophet presents of the character and triumphs of the Messiah, affords the joyful conviction that nothing is left unfinished which was necessary for the salvation of man. The all-perfect obedience which divine holiness exacted, has been rendered, and the atonement to offended justice has been made. The exercise of mercy is no longer incompatible with the holiness and justice of the Sovereign and Judge of the universe. Christ is able to save to the uttermost those who come unto God through him. Seated on the throne of his glory as the Mediator and King of his church, he dispenses to his penitent people that grace which will enable *them* to

triumph over all the enemies of their salvation, whom *he* hath already vanquished.

Come then, ye sons of men—for you this glorious Redeemer shed his blood, for you he purchased the almighty succours of his grace—come, thankfully accept the offers of salvation which he extends to you. He is mighty to save you from your sins, which render you obnoxious to the divine displeasure. Trust cordially and supremely in his mercy and grace, and faithfully adore and serve him; and he will exalt you to the glories of his celestial throne.

But if you reject that love which prompted him to undergo such tremendous sufferings, and to achieve such glorious victories for you and for your salvation—if you continue impenitent and unholy, the slaves of sin and the world, when he calls and urges you to return to him—he will open upon you those stores of wrath which he once poured forth on the adversaries which held you in bondage. When he comes, the day of vengeance again in his heart, to execute the fierceness of his displeasure on those who obey not his Gospel, he will trample them in his anger, he will make them drunk in his fury; yes, in the forcible language of inspiration, he will spill their life-blood on the ground.

Finally. The contemplation of this glowing prophetic description of the character and offices of the Messiah should impress us with the sentiments of lively gratitude for his unparalleled condescension and mercy.

Alone he trod the wine-press of divine wrath, and of the people there was none with him. Persecuted by those whom he came to save—deserted

by his disciples, whom he had distinguished by so many acts of love—forsaken, in the hour of his bitter agony, by his God—the Saviour of the world sunk, friendless and alone, under the overwhelming flood of divine justice.

And shall we still, blessed Saviour, withhold from thee our sympathy—still, unmoved, behold thy bitter sufferings, and refuse to commemorate them in the sacrament of thy institution—cruel as thy murderers, crucify thee afresh by our sins? No; unless our souls are dead to the emotions of sympathy, of gratitude, and love.

My brethren, the season has arrived, sacred to the commemoration of the sufferings of our Lord. In the primitive church, the whole season of Lent was devoted to acts of humiliation and penitence in memory of the sufferings of Christ, and the week of his crucifixion was marked by extraordinary acts of devotion. This pious custom is preserved in our church, which provides daily services during this week. Let it not be said that we cannot spare a few hours from business or pleasure to devote to the grateful commemoration of the sufferings of him who devoted his life and his death for us: especially on the day consecrated to the commemoration of his last agonies, in our private devotions as well as in the public service of the church, let us gratefully celebrate the infinite love which induced the Son of God to offer himself up a sacrifice on the cross for our redemption.

And as thou, O holy Jesus, didst, on this day, die to destroy, by the power of thy death, the dominion of our spiritual adversaries, so, by thy grace, may our spiritual death unto sin be this day effected; that thus rising to a new and holy life, we

may be fitted for sharing with thee in the glories of that celestial kingdom to which, as the reward of thy sufferings, thou art exalted, and where thou livest and reignest, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one God, for ever and ever ; to whom be ascribed all honour, power, majesty, and dominion, world without end.

SERMON XXVI.

THE GRAVE OF JESUS—THE SCENE OF THE RESURRECTION.

MATTHEW XXVIII. 1.

In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary to see *the sepulchre*.

THE impulse of lively affection only could have directed the footsteps of these females to the place where their Lord lay. No expectation had they that he had risen from the dead; for, in common with his disciples, they supposed that the stone which closed the door of his sepulchre had shut him for ever from the world, and frustrated all the hopes which they had entertained that it was he who should redeem Israel. Well, therefore, might their breasts be agitated with the mingled emotions of fear and joy, when “a great earthquake” proclaimed the descent of a celestial messenger, whose “countenance was like lightning, and whose raiment was white as snow;” and who addressed to them the infinitely momentous tidings—“Ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said, Come, see the place where the Lord lay.”

This is the language with which the church addresses us on this sacred festival. It was but lately she called us to contemplate, with sorrow and penitence, the Saviour, as the man of sorrow; his

visage marred through suffering; smitten for our transgressions; bruised for our iniquities; pouring out his soul unto death. In the solemnities of yesterday, she called us to commemorate the descent of his body into the house of silence, to sanctify for us the chambers of corruption, while his soul passed to the prison of departed spirits, to proclaim to them the glad tidings of redemption. This day she calls us to his sepulchre, cheering us with the glad tidings—"He is not here: he is risen. Come, see the place where the Lord lay." "Christ is risen from the dead, and dieth no more." "Death hath no more dominion over him." "The Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel."

The scene of the resurrection—

1. Is an interesting scene ;
2. It affords an evidence of the divine power of Christ ; and,
3. It is a pledge of his mercy and compassion, and of the glorious hope of immortality.

1. The scene of the resurrection is an *interesting* scene.

In the sepulchre rests that divine Personage whose life had been uniformly pure, exemplary, and benevolent, and yet whose life had been a continued series of pain and suffering. Here, at length, he reposes in peace. He has reached a haven where he is sheltered from those tempests that rolled the waves of sorrow over his soul. On the cross he poured forth his soul, and finished the work of suffering. He has become the peaceful tenant of the tomb—of that house of silence where the sorrows of life are forgotten—the wicked cease

from troubling him—the persecuted Friend of man at length finds rest.

Contemplating then the grave merely as the place of rest to the holy Jesus from the calamities which had so long pursued him, we must regard it with interest; for in its quiet abode this divine and benevolent, but persecuted Saviour of the world, has at length found a refuge which calamity cannot disturb, where the darts of calumny and persecution cannot assail him, where the voice of the oppressor is no more heard.

But the scene of the resurrection is also interesting on account of the varied and anxious emotions which must have agitated the breasts of the disciples.

Their Master, their Companion, their Guide, their most tender and faithful Friend, had been wrested from them by the hand of violence, crucified, and slain. With what sacred affection must they have beheld the tomb which guarded his precious remains! Mary Magdalene, who, having had much forgiven, loved much, anticipating even the dawn of day, hurried to pour forth her affectionate lamentations at the sepulchre of her Lord. When the tidings reached them that the body of their Master was not to be found, the disciple whom Jesus loved, and the faithless but penitent Peter, full of anxious affection, hastened to the sepulchre. It was a period of awful solicitude to them; for the mysterious scenes of the cross and the sepulchre involved not only their destiny, but the destiny of a fallen world. The sepulchre was either to hold for ever the body of the crucified Jesus, and thus to frustrate the hopes of redemption through him; or, bursting its bands, Jesus was to issue

from it, the victorious Conqueror of death and the grave, the Author of life and immortality. Behold, then, a fallen world stands at the sepulchre of Jesus, wailing its destiny, trembling lest the bands of corruption should hold him, and thus blast the hope that he was to be the world's Redeemer.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, this state of awful suspense did not long continue. A messenger from heaven proclaims the tidings—"He has risen." Thus,

2. The scene of the resurrection affords an evidence of the divine power of Jesus.

But as yesterday we beheld committed to the tomb the body of him who had been crucified as a malefactor. The sepulchre was in the custody of his implacable enemies. The seal of the civil authority is set to the stone which closed the door. A watch is placed to guard it.

To-day we go to the place where the Lord lay. The body of Jesus is not there. By whom could it have been removed? By the disciples and followers of Christ? They had not the courage nor the means for accomplishing the theft. For when their Master was taken to the judgment-seat of Pilate, they forsook him and fled. And would they have run the risk of detection, and of the most severe punishment, in order to get into their possession the body of him whom they had thus basely forsaken? Where was the watch, too, which was set by his inveterate enemies to guard the sepulchre?

That the body of Jesus could have been stolen from the place where it was thus guarded, is wholly incredible, is morally impossible. The mighty

power of God raised his Son Jesus from the dead. Of this indeed he has given the fullest, the most irrefragable testimony, in the miraculous success and propagation of that Gospel throughout the world—which is founded on the truth, that the crucified Jesus of Nazareth has risen again—by simple, friendless, obscure fishermen of Galilee.

Come then, unbeliever! view on this day the sepulchre of Jesus. Lately to this tomb was committed his body. He had repeatedly predicted, that, though he should be crucified, on the third day he should rise again. His enemies resolved to frustrate his predictions, and to prove him an impostor; and with this view they guarded the sepulchre. But all their precautions proved vain. Look at the tomb of Jesus: the body of him who was lately its tenant is not to be found; and behold, he appears to his disciples: he walks abroad in the face of day; he comes into the midst of them in their private retirement; he talks with them; he eats with them; he invites them to handle him, to be satisfied that he is not a spirit. The incredulous Thomas he calls—"Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side." He ascends into heaven in their presence. He bestows upon them, according to his promise, the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost. Thus armed with power from on high, they go forth conquering and to conquer. The prejudices, the pride, the passions, the wealth, the learning, the power of the world, vanish before the preaching of these obscure and condemned men, like the dew before the beams of the morning. The nations become the kingdoms of God and of his Christ; and this day Christians celebrate that

holy sacrament which has brought down, from the period of his appearance, the solemn truth, that he who had died had risen again.

Will the unbeliever resist these facts? Will he justify his incredulity by the idle tale, that the disciples came by night and stole away the body of Jesus? Will he maintain that Jesus was an impostor, and his disciples impostors, like their Master? And yet these impostors displayed all the simplicity, disinterestedness, undaunted zeal of the most upright and sincere votaries of truth. These impostors, contemporary historians, their enemies, acknowledge exercised miraculous powers. They planted in every land a pure and holy religion, on the ruins of an idolatry deeply seated in the prejudices and passions of the multitude. And though the kings of the earth rise up, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against his anointed, this religion and its ordinances, coeval with the events which they commemorate, still subsist. The gates of hell have poured forth their forces, but have been unable to prevail against that Gospel, which there are those who say is founded in delusion. Surely they are fighting against God—surely they are resisting the clearest evidence that can be presented to influence the understanding and the heart.

Be not then faithless, but believing. Believe in him who is the way, the truth, and the life; who was the purest, the most benevolent, the most amiable personage that ever visited our miserable world. Believe in him whose Gospel is the most ennobling and consolatory system that ever blessed our fallen race. It dispenses light for the darkness of human reason; it discloses mercy for the frail-

ties and sins of fallen man ; it provides grace and strength for his weak and erring nature ; it offers consolation and support under the sorrows and bereavements that crowd upon him ; it provides for him that immortality and bliss, to which every power of his soul aspires, and for which every feeling of his soul pants. What infatuation, then—what madness would it be to reject these blessings—to spurn from us the world's Redeemer, to quench the light of divine truth and mercy, and to grope in error and sin, till at length our feet stumble on the dark mountains, and the ways of peace be forever hid from our eyes ! But,

3. The scene of the resurrection affords also a pledge of the mercy and compassion of the Saviour, and of the glorious hope of immortality.

What, indeed, was the whole life of Christ but a constant display of mercy and compassion ? For what did he make his birth-place a stable, and his cradle a manger ? For what did he encounter the ills of poverty, tread the path of suffering, wander more desolate than the foxes who have holes, and the birds of the air who have nests, without a place to lay his head ? For what did he encounter the treachery of friends, and the scorn and persecution of his enemies—give his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair ? For what, in Gethsemane's garden, did he sweat drops of blood ; and in the darkness and horrors of Calvary, yield up his soul in death ? For what all this, but to prosecute his work of mercy and compassion for guilty man ?

Yet, unavailing would have been the humiliation of the manger, the path of suffering, the scourge—

of persecution, the agonies of Gethsemane, the horrors of Calvary, if, at length, he had been subject for ever to the dominion of the grave; the sword of divine justice would still have remained unsheathed, the sceptre of mercy still prostrate, the gate of heaven still closed.

But when Jesus burst the bands of the grave, when he shook off the garments of corruption, he afforded a sure pledge of his mercy and compassion, proved, by this his victory over death, through the power of the Almighty Father, that the sacrifice of his cross was accepted, that the justice of the Eternal was satisfied, the holiness of the Sovereign of the universe vindicated, and the kingdom of heaven opened to true believers. His resurrection exhibits the pledge that death is vanquished, corruption disarmed; and that, finally, death and the sea shall give up their dead, to appear in incorruptible bodies at the judgment-seat of God.

Ye then, to whom the remembrance of your sins is grievous, and the burden of them intolerable, behold, in the resurrection of your Lord, the solemn pledge that the atonement which divine justice demanded has been made; that Christ your Redeemer, who poured forth his blood for you on the cross, is exalted to heaven, to give remission of sins to all who believe in his name. Hear the voice of mercy which, risen from the grave and enthroned in majesty in the heavens, he addresses to you: "I am he who once died, but am now risen again, and liveth for ever—exalted to be a Prince and Saviour, to give deliverance to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound. The bruised reed will I not break: with me there is mercy and plenteous redemption.

Come then to the fountain that is opened for sin and for uncleanness : wash, and be clean. Come ye to the waters ; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

Ye thoughtless and sinful votaries of the world, listen to the voice of expostulation which he who this day burst the barriers of the tomb, the Almighty Conqueror, addresses to you : “ Is it nothing, that I trod for you the wine-press of the fierce anger of the Almighty ? Is it nothing, that, on the cross, I encountered for you the agonies of death, and cried out as one forsaken by my God ? Is it nothing, that for your redemption I have burst the bands of the grave, and escaped from corruption ? Is it nothing, that from the throne of my glory, where I am now exalted, I offer you pardon and salvation ? Yet a little while, the day of grace will be closed : the sceptre of mercy, which is now extended, will be laid aside. The judgment will be set, the books will be open. Read in them the awful doom of the impenitent contemners of my mercy—everlasting banishment from the presence of God, and from the glory of his power.”

Penitent believers, listen to the voice of that Saviour who this day rose for your justification : “ I have been the plague of death ; of the grave I have been the destruction. Repentance has been hid from mine eyes. For you, O believers, I hold the keys of death and hell. The prison of the grave shall not hold you. Corruption shall not have power over you. Your mortal shall put on immortality. You shall enter the paradise of God. I will lead you to living fountains of water. All tears shall be wiped from your eyes.”

Ye, then, who mourn the dissolution of some of

the tender ties of life, take comfort at the grave of your Saviour Jesus, who, rising in power from it, proclaims—"I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die." "Sorrow not then as those that have no hope." The beloved friends whose departure ye mourn, united to him by faith, are not dead for ever. Short and peaceful is the slumber of their grave. Soon shall their bodies wake from corruption, and be united to their souls, now in the paradise of God. Secure your interest in the merits of him who once died for your sins, and rose for your justification. Then through the vale of death he will in safety conduct you; to the celestial Zion he will bring you, to join before his throne the blessed saints who have gone before you, and you shall ever be with the Lord. Comfort one another with these words; comfort one another with these glorious hopes.

Christians, the pledges of these hopes are spread before you, in the memorials of the body and blood of your Lord. Your Saviour, who is risen from the grave, and sits in glory in heaven, offers you the spiritual food of his precious body and blood. Eat and drink with lively, and humble, and holy faith; and by the merits and power of his body and blood your souls and bodies shall be nourished and strengthened to everlasting life.

SERMON XXVII.

THE DISPLAY OF THE DIVINE GLORY IN OUR REDEMPTION.

ISAIAH xlv. 23.

Sing, O ye heavens; for the Lord hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel.

DEEPLY interesting must have been the subject which occupied the view of the prophet, when, not satisfied with the strains of personal exultation, he bursts forth in the awakening call to universal nature to take up the song of rejoicing. It was not a private mercy extended to the prophet; it was not a temporal blessing bestowed on that chosen people to whom he had been so often the messenger of the counsels and commands of the Lord, and whose destinies had been so often the subject of his predictions. His view glanced beyond the scenes around him, and fixed on those distant periods when the Lord would visit his people with mercy from on high, and bring spiritual redemption to his chosen. The deliverance of Israel from the hands of their enemies, the immediate subject that warmed the soul of the prophet, animating subject of gratitude as it was, he considers but as a type and a pledge of that redemption from sin and death which God would vouchsafe to the world. The glorious event was not to take place until after the lapse of ages: but to the excited and en-

raptured imagination of the prophet, ages revolve in an instant—the long tract of time loses its distance—the event appears present—the redemption of man seems accomplished—Jehovah *has* blotted out, as a cloud, his transgressions, and as a thick cloud, his sins. Transport swells the soul of the prophet. Feeble is *his* tongue, feeble the tongues of his fellow-mortals to pour forth praises worthy of the celestial theme. He gives a tongue to universal nature—he awakens heaven and earth in the song of exultation that the world, the spiritual Israel, is redeemed—“Sing, O ye heavens; for the Lord hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, and every tree therein: for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel.”

My brethren, we surely require no exhortations to excite in our bosoms the emotions of gratitude, to engage our tongues in the songs of praise. We have not, like the prophet, to stretch forward our imaginations to distant ages, to future events: we can indeed say, without the ardent stretch of anticipation, The Lord *has* redeemed Jacob, the Lord *has* glorified himself in Israel. Through the course of her services the church has presented to us, from the records of divine truth, the history of that redemption which, commencing in the eternal counsels of the Godhead, was effected in the incarnation, the obedience, the sufferings, and the death of the Son of God. She now sets before us the completion of these great events, in the annunciation that Christ, who was dead, is risen again, and liveth for ever: the sacrifice of his cross has been accepted; the domains of death he has passed in triumph; the strong holds of the

adversary he has subdued; the grave he has despoiled of its victory; the keys of death and hell he holds for ever; and he opens the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

“Sing then, O ye heavens; for the Lord hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, and every tree therein: for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel.”

The display of the divine glory in our redemption, is the theme which the prophet calls on universal nature to celebrate.

It was planned in the eternal counsels of the Godhead;

It commenced in the incarnation of the Son of God;

It was prosecuted in his spotless life and perfect obedience;

It was effected by his sufferings and death; and,

It is assured to us by the event of this day—his resurrection from the dead.

Let us contemplate this wonderful series of events, that our gratitude may be excited, and that we may join, with all our powers and affections, in the exulting triumph with which the prophet celebrates this great redemption.

1. This redemption was planned in the eternal counsels of the Godhead.

When the world was to be framed, and when man was to be created to possess and to enjoy it, we behold the persons of the adorable Godhead counselling together concerning the mighty work: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” And when this world, created in order, in

beauty, and in glory, was defaced and ruined by the disobedience of man; and when man himself, the lord of creation, became subject to sin, to sorrow, and to death,—his restoration to holiness and bliss, no less than his first creation, occupied the divine counsels. Prophetic vision unfolds the mysterious scene, and leads us, as it were, into the presence of the persons of the Godhead. “Who will find a ransom?” is the language in which inspiration represents the Almighty Father as preparing the merciful work of man’s redemption. Who among the glorious hosts that surround the throne of the Eternal, will undertake to vindicate the honour of his violated government, and to satisfy the demands of the holiness and justice of the Sovereign of the universe? Who among the most exalted seraphs will come forward to sustain those penalties which are due to the sins of the whole human race, and thus find their ransom from the everlasting bondage of sin and death? Alas! the immense load of human guilt was not to be sustained by any created being: the virtues of the brightest seraph would be found wanting, if scrutinized by the holiness of his Maker; and before the justice of the Eternal, in its inflexible rigour, not even the cherubim could stand. The eternal Son, “he saw that there was no man—he wondered that there was no intercessor.” The vindication of the violated laws of the Almighty Father, the redemption of a world doomed to destruction, appeared objects not unworthy of the divine perfections of the Son of God. “Lo, I come to do thy will, O God,” is the language which, in the counsels of the Godhead, inspiration ascribes to the Son. The work of redemption is thus planned;

and anticipating its accomplishment, the glad tidings burst forth from the celestial host—The world is redeemed! At the display of the divine power and glory that created the world, “the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.” Surely not less universal, not less ardent the exultation, in those pure and perfect spirits that continually surround the divine Majesty, at the view of the infinite wisdom, love, and power which planned the redemption of a fallen world—which thus devised the mode by which pardon could be extended to the sinner without sanctioning his sin, and favour to the offending rebel against the divine government, without weakening its authority, impeaching its holiness, or subverting its justice. In the nature of the divine Persons thus counselling for man’s redemption, it is not for him, blind, and erring, and impotent—it is not for angels, it is not for cherubim or seraphim, for a moment to look—the inner glory of the divine nature burns with a blaze, if I may so with reverence speak, too intense, too radiant for finite vision. But in its manifestations, in its outer, its more distant rays, shining on the plan of man’s redemption, all is mildness, and softness, and peace: holiness, and justice, and mercy are seen blending their sacred influences, and conveying light and joy in that truth which the counsels of the Godhead alone could render possible—God can be just, and yet justify the sinner.

The redemption of man, thus planned in the counsels of the Godhead, was,

2. Commenced in the *incarnation* of the eternal Son.

The nature of man was to be assumed; for man was subject to the law, and man must obey it: man had transgressed the law, and in the same nature must its penalties be sustained; in the nature which had sinned was the atonement to be made. "A body therefore was prepared" for the Son of God, that in it he might render that obedience which would satisfy the claims of the violated law, and be a perfect model for our imitation. "A body was prepared" for the Son of God, that thus sustaining our infirmities, we might be assured that he is touched with a feeling for them, and is a compassionate High Priest, not only able, but willing to succour us. And "a body was prepared" for the Son of God, that by his mighty power the fallen nature of man might, in his person, pass through the grave and gate of death to a joyful resurrection. What unsearchable wisdom, what infinite love does the mystery of the incarnation exhibit! At this display of the divine mercy, when the Son of God took upon him our nature, and was born the Saviour Christ the Lord, well might the angels leave their seats of bliss to chant forth to the world the songs of triumph—"Glorify to God in the highest, peace on earth, good will to men."

3. The redemption of man was prosecuted in the spotless life, and perfect obedience, and holy instructions of the incarnate Son of God.

It was an obedience which left no duty unperformed, no sacrifice unpaid: it was an obedience which, not content with an external compliance with the law, entered into its pure and rigorous spirit—not satisfied with the discharge of the highest duties, it descended to the most minute—not

founding its claims on one particular virtue, it exhibited an illustrious pattern of them all: it was an obedience which, so far from lowering the standard of duty, exalted its power, its obligation, and its sanctions: the obedience of the Son of God, it could sustain the scrutiny of that holiness which discerns imperfection in the most exalted of human beings.

In entire conformity with the spotless life and perfect obedience of the Saviour, were the instructions which flowed from his lips: while they exalted the rules of duty, they made such clear and terrible appeals to the understanding and the heart, that even the rage of his enemies was disarmed, and the accusations of malice were changed into the loud homage of praise—"Never man spake like this man." Spotless in all his actions; gentle, unoffending, unassuming, yet firm, bold, and undaunted when duty urged, even his enemies poured forth their tribute to his virtues—"He hath done all things well." Yes; would we behold truth and virtue displayed in celestial splendour, and the divine perfections shining forth in transcendent brightness, we must contemplate him who appeared, in all his precepts and in all his actions, "the brightness of the Father's glory, full of grace and truth." He thus rendered that perfect obedience to the law which man was unable to render, and released man from subjection to its rigorous demands, and rendered him capable of its rewards.

4. Our redemption, thus prosecuted in the spotless life and perfect obedience of the Son of God, was effected by his sufferings and death.

Sufferings and death were the penalties of the

violated law of God—and sufferings and death the Son of God, in man's nature, the representative of his guilt, endured, that he might discharge man from punishment. It was thus that he "bore our sins and carried our sorrows."

You have listened, during the past week, in the services of the church, to the simple but affecting history of the passion of your Saviour. You beheld the cup of sorrow presented to him. "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done." He drank of that cup of trembling, into which were poured the phials of divine wrath. Fear, dismay, agony unutterable filled his soul. For, brethren, let us not forget, that, though the Son of God, he was also man—man capable of pain and agony, like ourselves. And what must have been that agony, which started, through every pore of his body, drops of blood? What must have been that darkness under which the Son of the Father cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

These agonies display the infinite demerit of the sin which produced them. Let us contemplate them with abhorrence of our iniquities, lest our unrepented sins expose us to this awful indignation. And let us contemplate the sufferings and death of the Son of God with holy hope; for they are the price of our redemption. By his stripes we are healed.

Yes, my brethren; he whom we lately beheld extended on the cross, and whom we lately followed with mourning hearts to the sepulchre, is now exalted to be a Prince and Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins. Of this God has given triumphant assurance, in that he hath raised his Son

Jesus Christ from the dead. He has shaken off the garments of corruption, and shines forth in the brightness of the Father's glory. He has loosed the bands of the grave, and broken the sceptre of the prince of darkness, and stands forth the King of the kings of the earth, the Conqueror of death and hell. "O death, he hath been thy plagues; O grave, he has been thy destruction." How illustrious the glory which encircled the Saviour when he forsook the dark mansions of the tomb! How awful that majesty before which the hosts of darkness fled dismayed, and that power which bound in everlasting chains death and the grave! How worthy of triumphant adoration that love which opens the kingdom of heaven to all believers, and prepares for them the seats of everlasting glory! "Sing, O ye heavens; for the Lord hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel."

When the whole world is represented as interested in that glorious plan of redemption which restores man from the ruins of the fall, and places him in that new world wherein dwelleth righteousness—when the heavens and the earth are summoned to bear their part in the chorus of thanksgiving to the world's Redeemer, to the Son of God rising in triumph from the tomb—let not those who are the immediate objects of these transcendent blessings, let not "Jacob, whom he hath redeemed, and Israel, whom he hath glorified," remain indifferent and insensible: let not these glorious and sublime truths, because they transcend our feeble comprehension, be slighted or rejected. We find in them

the means and pledges of virtue, and peace, and felicity, which nature and reason cannot supply; and it is therefore our highest wisdom to embrace them on account of their practical benefits, inscrutable as may be their speculative character. Many are the feelings within us which long for immortality; many are the feelings within us which turn back with horror from the dark thought of the annihilation of being; many are the suggestions with which reason aims to fortify those hopes of an endless existence with which nature would fain light up the darkness of that tomb. But on a subject so tremendous, so interesting as the grave and what is beyond it, the anxious soul seeks relief from all her doubts and all her fears in some fixed assurance of the Being who made, and who is to judge her. Amidst those apprehensions which the sense of guilt inspires, she looks with trembling solicitude for some mode devised by infinite wisdom and power, and accepted by infinite holiness and justice, by which she may escape the displeasure of her eternal Judge, which conscience tells her she deserves, and secure that immortal felicity of which she feels her purest services can never render her worthy. This mode of deliverance and acceptance, this assurance of life and immortality, are proclaimed by Jesus Christ the Son of God, and by him only. Satisfying divine justice, vindicating the divine holiness, sustaining the penalties of the violated law, he hath removed every obstacle which the just and holy character and government of the Ruler of the universe could oppose to the pardon of his rebellious creatures; and having himself burst the bands of the grave, he proclaims with power—"I am the resurrection and the life: he

that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live : and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die."

Every feeling of nature would wish to cherish as true, the assurance that life and immortality are brought to light by the resurrection of Christ from the dead : it claims our belief by an evidence which wilful prejudice and obstinate incredulity can alone withstand. The disciples of a man crucified as a malefactor, they who forsook their dying Master, suddenly became bold, courageous, undismayed in danger, in persecution, in death : illiterate, feeble, contemned, they established a pure, and holy, and self-denying religion on the ruins of those superstitions and corrupt systems which held so firm a hold on the prejudices, the power, the pride, and the passions of mankind. This must have been the Lord's doing : this moral conquest, this conversion of a corrupt and opposing world to a pure faith and a holy practice, could have been effected only by divine power, that divine power by which the Master whom they beheld crucified was raised from the dead. This was the truth forced on their own tardy belief, and which they attested by signs, and wonders, and mighty works, and to the belief of which they converted an unwilling and incredulous world.

Brethren, let us then seriously consider, if Christ be indeed raised from the dead, and is seated in power and majesty, the King of kings and Lord of lords, great will be the peril of rejecting or neglecting his offers of mercy, great the peril of remaining in rebellion against his righteous sway : and in rebellion against his righteous sway are all who have not, by the power of his grace, become

dead to sin, and new creatures in holiness. "God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds."* "Great is the mystery of godliness: God manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory."† "Put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the Spirit," he is declared to be "the Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead." Let us not then neglect this wonderful counsel of God for our salvation; let us not be unaffected by this most stupendous display of divine power, and love, and mercy; let us not reject the offers of peace and salvation from the God whom we have offended, and the Sovereign who is finally to judge us. But, on the contrary, let us gratefully adore the majesty, the mercy, and the grace of the Godhead in the plan of redemption, effected in the incarnation, the obedience, the sufferings, the death, and the triumphant resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Let it be our great object to be conformed to the likeness of his death, in mortifying all our corrupt affections, and to experience the power of his resurrection in living a new and holy life, that we may enjoy the new and lively hopes of everlasting glory which his resurrection assures to all true believers. And to testify our belief in our once crucified but now highly exalted Saviour—to show forth our confidence, our gratitude, our love to him who died for us, and for us rose again—let us humbly and joyfully advance

* Heb. i. 1.

† 1 Tim. iii. 16.

to that holy supper which he instituted, and receive the pledges of his mercy, his grace, and his everlasting favour : there let us keep the feast, in memory of Christ, that very Paschal Lamb who was offered for us, and hath taken away the sin of the world—who by his death hath destroyed death, and by his rising to life again, hath restored to us everlasting life : there let us proclaim, with holy triumph, that Christ hath risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept ; and there let us receive the pledges of that hope, at once our triumph and our joy—our triumph over the doubts and the errors of this mortal life—our joy amidst the changes, the sorrows, and the trials of this uncertain world—that when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we also shall appear with him in glory, and be made like unto him in his eternal and glorious kingdom.

SERMON XXVIII.

THE REASONS OF JOY IN CONTEMPLATING THE DAY OF THE LORD.

PSALM cxviii. 24.

This is the day which the Lord hath made ; we will rejoice and be glad in it.

Thus, my brethren, is the voice of triumph which, on the recent festival of Esther, was heard in the church. What a different scene, even to the eye of the world, does the day of Christ's resurrection present, from that which marked the day of his crucifixion ! We, my brethren, even on that day, penetrated by faith the cloud of humiliation which enveloped our Lord and Master, and beheld his cross and passion but as the preludes to his glorious resurrection—to the triumphs of this day. But the incredulous world could only have seen in Jesus Christ a malefactor suffering the ignominious death of the cross.

What is the spectacle which the day of Christ's resurrection presents ? The sepulchre to which the body of this malefactor was consigned, the entrance of which was sealed by the seal of the Roman governor, and which was guarded by the implacable enemies of Christ, is open—the body of Jesus is gone. Even the incredulous world must adopt the language of the faithful—"The Lord is risen indeed." "This is the day which the Lord hath made ; let us rejoice and be glad."

Yes, my brethren, this one circumstance alone, if there is faith to be given to what no man in his senses will doubt—historical testimony—this one circumstance, that the body of the crucified Jesus disappeared from that tomb which his vigilant enemies guarded with the express purpose of preventing its being stolen away—this one circumstance proves that he must have burst the bands of the grave through divine power—that God raised him from the dead.

But we have other evidence of this glorious event. It is morally impossible that the apostles should violate every dictate of common sense, and every feeling of interest, by enduring persecutions and privations without a parallel, in the service of a crucified impostor—in the testimony that their Master had risen; that they had seen him, conversed with him, handled him, and associated with him for a considerable time—when, in fact, his body was rotting in the grave. It is morally impossible that they should have submitted to persecution and death in attestation of an event which they knew had never happened; that they, who, timid and cowardly, forsook their Master and fled when he was taken and crucified, should suddenly become bold and undaunted in proclaiming what they knew to be false—that this crucified malefactor had risen from the dead. We shall discover an incredulity which sets common sense at defiance, if we can believe that these unlettered, friendless, and despised fishermen of Galilee could, by their own unassisted efforts, induce the Jew to forsake the magnificent ceremonies of his law, and the Pagan to renounce his vices, and the splendid, wanton, and sensual worship that allured him in

the temples of his gods, in order to take up the cross of an outcast Nazarene. It would be the extreme of incredulity to believe that the stupendous truth, that the crucified Jesus was risen from the dead and exalted to universal dominion, should almost immediately find its way into the remotest regions of the known world, and become the glory and the consolation of the learned and the great, as well as of the poor and the ignorant, unless it had been enforced by the power of the Most High.

Of the day of Christ's resurrection we may then say, in the language with which the inspired psalmist eulogized it—"This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad." We rejoice,

1. Because, by his resurrection, the scandal of the cross of Christ is removed.

Certainly the humiliation in which Christ appeared was not calculated to conciliate the favour of mankind. Poverty, obscurity, suffering, are not the passports to their applause. Pride of birth, elevation of station, and a course marked by ease, by wealth, by splendour, and by deeds of glory, are the means of exciting human favour and commanding human applause. Jesus Christ had none of these, with which to win the hearts of men. Humble in his birth, poor and suffering in his life, he died the death of a malefactor. The world beheld only darkness, only scandal in the cross. But when Jesus Christ arose from the grave, he surrounded that cross with splendour and with glory. The Victim who suffered on it is not a malefactor smitten of God, but the favourite of heaven, who

has vanquished death, and is crowned with honour.
We rejoice,

2. Because the resurrection of Christ authorizes our confidence in him as a Teacher sent from God.

It is indeed most contrary to human calculation, that a messenger from heaven, on the most benign errand that could bring down one of its exalted host, should appear in the character of the most humble of the tenants of the earth, and, marking his course by tears and sorrow, should descend from the cross to the tomb. But how has God confounded the wisdom of this world! The cloud of humiliation that covered the Saviour, rendered more illustrious the glory of his resurrection, and made more striking this attestation of God to the truth of his mission. "He was crucified out of *weakness*," saith the apostle; "he liveth by the *power of God*." He foretold what the language of prophecy had pointed out as the characteristic of the Messiah, that he should be crucified, and should rise again. Contrary to all human calculation, and certainly above all human power, the prediction was verified: Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. He could have been thus raised only by the power of God. Either, then, we must blasphemously put the seal of God to an imposture, or acknowledge that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is from above; that all which he proclaimed, all which he commanded, all which he promised, all which he threatened, are armed with the authority and sanctioned by the voice of the Most High. We rejoice,

3. For the resurrection of Christ proved that he is, what he claimed to be, a divine person—the Son of God.

It was the character of the Messiah predicted by the prophets, that he was to be the Lord our righteousness. As “the Lord,” this messenger of the covenant was to “come to *his* temple.” And corresponding with the predictions concerning him, and with the magnificent preparations for his coming, to which all the divine dispensations pointed from the beginning of the world, were many of the circumstances of his appearance. His incarnation by the power of the Holy Ghost; the praises of the celestial legions at his birth; the new star that proclaimed his glory in the East; the voice from heaven acknowledging him to be the beloved Son of God; the transfiguration on Mount Tabor, when the divine glory encircled him; and even the hill of Calvary, which, the scene as it was of his ignominy, became, in the convulsions of nature, in the shrouding of the lights of heaven, in the opening of the tombs, in the rending of the vail of the temple, the theatre of his glory—all these prove that Jesus Christ is more than the most exalted of men: they confirm his own actions, when in his own name, and with no derivative or dependent power, he controls nature at his will, and shows that he is nature’s Maker and Lord; they confirm his own declarations, when he assumes, without hesitation, an equality with God—before all things—one with the Father.

Still one thing was wanting to put the seal of God himself to the divinity of Christ—his resurrection from the dead. Committed, as he undoubtedly was, to the tomb as a malefactor, and yet

triumphantly predicting his rising again, all the evidences of his divinity afforded by the illustrious circumstances of his life, by his actions, by his declarations, would have passed for nothing, had the prediction not been fulfilled. If Jesus Christ had remained in the grave after he had predicted his triumph over it, he would have been consigned to infamy among the impostors that had deluded the world. But rising from the grave, he proves that he is the Son of God with power: he announces, in that mighty voice by which he burst the barriers of the tomb, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, the first and the last, the Almighty." "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore; and have the keys of death and hell." We further, then, rejoice,

4. Because, by his resurrection, Jesus Christ was constituted the Lord and Ruler of all things, and the Judge of the world.

"For this end," saith the apostle, "Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living." "God will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained, of which he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he raised him from the dead." Partaker of the glory of the Father before the world was, as the Son of God, Jesus Christ also, before the world was, possessed universal dominion. In an incomprehensible manner, but for a purpose infinitely beneficent—our salvation from sin and death—the Son of God assumed the body that was prepared for him, united himself to our nature; and it was in this his human nature, it was as the

Son of man that his resurrection exalted him to be the Ruler and the Judge of the world. This exaltation was the consequence and the reward of his passion: "For the suffering of death," saith the apostle, "Jesus is crowned with glory and honour." Having paid, by his most precious blood, our ransom to divine justice, he exercises dominion over us in right of purchase. Having achieved, by the power of his grace, our deliverance from the captivity of sin and Satan, his dominion over us is confirmed also by the right of conquest. To this dominion, the reward of his sufferings, he was visibly exalted at his resurrection. Then, in his human nature, he was set as the King on the "holy hill of Zion," not merely to exercise *temporary* dominion over *man* whom he had redeemed, but to possess a kingdom *endless* as eternity, and *extensive* as the universe. For it was the decree of the Almighty Father concerning the Son, as Mediator—"Thy throne endureth for ever and ever: thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion that which shall not be destroyed." "At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." For, "raised from the dead, he is set on the right hand of the Majesty on high, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, not only in this world, but in that which is to come; and all things are put under his feet." And "all power in heaven and earth" is thus given unto the Son of man, in order that he may protect and bless his church and people—that he may deliver them from their enemies—and finally coming as the King of kings and Lord of lords, to judge

the world, to gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, may exalt his faithful people to glory everlasting.

“This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad,”

5. For the event which we this day commemorate, assures us of our victory over sin, of pardon for its guilt, of deliverance from its bondage.

That man is a sinner, and that, as a sinner, he must be obnoxious to the divine displeasure, are truths for which we want no more than that testimony which experience and reason abundantly furnish; but how this divine justice is to be propitiated, and how, depraved and guilty, he is to be restored to the divine favour, are inquiries which the Almighty Lawgiver, Sovereign, and Judge, to whom man is accountable, can alone resolve; and for which, therefore, we must look to the revelation of his holy word. There we behold Jesus Christ, as the representative of guilty man, sustaining the burden of sin; we behold him in the agonies of death incurring its penalties. But what assurance does that cross on which he thus suffers for our sins, afford that the atonement there making is accepted by that righteous Judge, whose holiness, and justice, and authority inflexibly demand it? The cross gives no signs of mercy: the lightnings of vengeance blaze around it. On the cross Jesus Christ expires as one *forsaken by his God*—as one forsaken by his God he is committed to the tomb. It is from that tomb the voice of mercy issues—“The Lord has risen.” “Christ was delivered for our offences, he was raised for our justification.” “It is God that justifieth, who is he that con-

demneth?" "It is Christ who died, yea rather, who is risen again." "God, who hath quickened us together with Christ, hath forgiven us our trespasses." By this act of his power God testifies his acceptance of Christ's atonement; and now the penitent sinner can listen with full faith to the assurance of mercy—"God so loved the world, as to give his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but should have everlasting life."

Nor is this a vain hope; for while the resurrection of Christ is a pledge of our pardon, it is also the pledge of grace, of that grace whereby, as he died and rose again for us, so we may die unto sin, and rise again unto righteousness, and thus be partakers of the glory of his resurrection. The greatest of victories is that which is achieved over the body of sin, that body of sin which inthralls all men, and from which the greatest strength of intellect, and the highest human power, cannot deliver those who are in bondage to it. This victory is achieved only through the power of Christ's resurrection, which, while it imposes on us the obligation to walk in newness of life with that Saviour through whom we are risen to new principles and new hopes, inspires us with the confidence, that he who is raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, will also bless us in turning every one of us away from his iniquities, in restoring us from darkness unto light, and from the power of sin and Satan unto God. We rejoice,

6. For the resurrection of Christ assures us of victory over the world—arming us against its temptations, and supporting us under its sorrows.

Christ, raised from the dead, hath become our Almighty King and Ruler, and to him we owe allegiance. That same almighty power by which Jesus overcame death, assures to all his faithful members, to all true believers, that they shall overcome the world. That same almighty power which raised him from the darkness of the grave, will raise them from the darkness of sorrow. He lives, to be their Comforter, their Guide, their Saviour. When temptation assails, and sorrow threatens to overwhelm them, let them remember that they are the disciples not only of a tempted and suffering, but of a risen and highly exalted Saviour; and that, after his resurrection, he became vested with all power in heaven and on earth, for the purpose of exerting it in succouring and comforting his faithful people, for whom, having been tempted like as they are, he is touched with the tenderest sympathy. What temptations are too strong to be overcome by those whose Leader is almighty? And what afflictions can depress those whose Friend and Comforter—once, like them, the victim of sorrow—is as full of tenderness to sympathize with them, as he is of power to relieve them? This is the consolation which results from the incomprehensible union of the divine and the human nature in the person of Christ: as man, he is sensible of our infirmities—as God, he is able to relieve them. Jesus Christ, our Friend, the Brother of our nature, is risen, almighty in power and dominion, to succour and to comfort his people. And we rejoice,

7. *Lastly* Because the event which we this day celebrate, assures us of *victory over death*—

Death, our last and terrible enemy. Brethren, is he not terrible? He extinguishes life in the darkness of the grave—he consigns the body to corruption—his domains are cheerless, and destitute of hope. But, Christian, thou hast no need to fear this enemy of thy race—he need not be terrible to thee: the resurrection of thy Saviour assures thee of victory over him. Nature, unenlightened by the faith of Jesus, shudders at the darkness of the grave, in which are extinguished that life to which we fondly cling, and all its powers, its hopes, and its joys. But why shouldst thou shudder at it, Christian? The grave, to thee, is that paradise to which thy Saviour went with his first penitent disciple, his companion in death, and which he still blesses with his presence; and where thy spirit shall abide in all the ecstasy of hope, till the day of thy full redemption.

Nature shudders at the destiny which, in the tomb, awaits the body—where the worm becomes its couch, and the earth-worm its covering. But hear, Christian, the voice which issues from the sepulchre of Jesus—“O death, I have been thy plagues; O grave, I have been thy destruction.” “The bodies of those which sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him; and their corruptible shall put on incorruption, and their mortal immortality.”

Nature shudders at the *silence* which reigns through the domains of death. For aught that reason or nature can assure us, it is the silence to which never comes the voice of joy. Reason and nature may hope; but what are faint and feeble hopes to sustain the soul, doubting and shuddering at the silence, the dread silence of the tomb? Christian, he who holds the keys of death

and hell, proclaims the holy assurance—"I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die." The silence of the tomb, Christian, is not the silence to which never comes the voice of joy: the strains of heaven are heard in it, and draw the enraptured soul to the bosom of endless felicity.

Exalted consummation of all the blessed effects of Christ's resurrection! when, in glorified bodies and purified souls, we shall unite in the hallelujahs of heaven before the throne of God. Let us love and serve that Redeemer who, by his resurrection from the dead, hath assured to us these exalted hopes. Let us commemorate, with penitence and faith, in the symbols of the altar, the sufferings and victories by which he effected our redemption, and there celebrate that victory over death which hath assured to us everlasting life. Let us live to him who died for us and rose again; and then, through his power, we shall pass through the grave and gate of death to a joyful resurrection, and be made partakers of bliss, both in body and soul, in his eternal and glorious kingdom.

SERMON XXIX.

THE EXCELLENCY OF FAITH.

JOHN XX. 29.

Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

THE apostles, who beheld Christ after his crucifixion and burial, were satisfied, on the evidence of their senses, that he had risen from the dead. The certainty which they enjoyed of his resurrection was not so properly the result of faith as of knowledge. What we see, we know to be true: what we are assured of on sufficient testimony, we believe to be true. The evidence, therefore, which arises from testimony, though a sufficient foundation for faith, regulating our conduct in the most important events of life, and producing on the mind full conviction, is still not so striking nor so strong as that which is produced by our senses, and which leads to knowledge.

Let us then seriously consider the nature of that faith to which is annexed the promise of salvation, in reference to the exercises of the understanding, to the dispositions of the heart, to its moral effects, and to the divine agency by which it is produced.

Those of the apostles, therefore, who saw our blessed Lord, enjoyed the greatest possible certainty of his resurrection. But Thomas was not present when Christ appeared unto the rest of the

apostles; he refused, therefore, to believe, on their testimony, that Christ had risen, and required the evidence of his senses. "Except," says he, "I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." Jesus afterwards appeared unto the apostles when Thomas was present, and called to him: "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing." Convinced by this irresistible evidence, Thomas exclaimed, in the ecstasy of adoration, "My Lord and my God."

Thomas was convinced of the resurrection of his Master on the evidence of sense. But belief founded on the evidence of testimony, on the statements of credible witnesses, is a law of our nature. To reject as false, every thing which we do not know from the evidence of our senses to be true, would so far abridge human knowledge, and diminish human activity, that the business of life would be arrested, and the human mind, now so complex and powerful in its operations, and extensive in its range, would sink into the mere instinct that guides the brutes to the preservation of animal existence. Confidence in the testimony of those who could not be deceived, who had no motive to deceive, or who are too honest to deceive, even if interest urged them to the attempt, is one of those laws incorporated with our nature by its Almighty Maker, on which all men act, which is essential in the daily intercourse of life, in the improvement of their minds, and in the enlargement of their knowledge; and without the agency of which, the beneficial and exalted operations of civil society could not proceed in guarding, strength-

ening, and completing the happiness and prosperity of the human race.

The testimony, therefore, of the disciples, his companions, who had seen the Lord, ought to have satisfied the incredulous Thomas ; and for his unbelief he was therefore gently reprov'd by our blessed Lord : “ Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed : ” adding, in commendation of that faith which is founded, not on the evidence of sense, but of testimony : “ blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.”

Brethren, in this declaration of our blessed Lord we are deeply concerned. We do not possess the evidence of our Lord’s resurrection, and of the divinity of his mission, which the apostles enjoyed : they repeatedly saw and conversed with that same Jesus whom they had beheld crucified and committed to the tomb. On the evidence of their senses, therefore, they were satisfied that Jesus had risen from the dead, and they adored him as their Lord and their God. The truth of his resurrection, of the consequent divinity of his mission, and of the doctrines which by him, or by his authority, were promulgated, we receive on the testimony of the apostles. We therefore are of the number of those who have not seen, and yet have believed : and if our faith be sincere and holy in its operations on our hearts and lives, we shall be entitled to that commendation of our Lord : “ Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed.”

The text, therefore, leads us to consider the *excellence of faith*, and the *blessedness* of it.

The excellence of faith consists—

I. In its rational character, as the assent of the understanding founded on *sufficient evidence* ;

II. In the exalted *dispositions* which are connected with it ;

III. In the *moral effects* which it produces ;

IV. And in its *divine origin*, as excited and called into exercise by the agency of the Holy Spirit of God.

I. The excellence of faith consists in its rational character, as the assent of the understanding on sufficient evidence.

The object of Christian faith is the revelation which God has made of his will by Jesus Christ. In order to command the assent of the understanding to the truth of this revelation, it must appear that a revelation is possible, that it was necessary, that this revelation has been made.

Revelation is possible. The Being who made and who rules all things, is the infinite source of truth and of wisdom ; and therefore he *can devise* that system which will convey moral truth and wisdom to his intelligent creatures ; and almighty and irresistible in power, he *can make* known to them his will. And it was necessary and expedient that the Governor of the universe should proclaim to man, by a special revelation, a system of religious truth and duty. For human reason had proved an incompetent guide in those interesting subjects connected with the spiritual and immortal interests of man. On points in which it was essential that he should arrive at certainty, reason could only offer conjecture and hope. Prompted by the general view of God's mercy, she might indulge the hope that he would extend par-

don to the penitent sinner ; but no effort of reason could determine the mode in which the Ruler of the world, consistently with his holiness and justice, could exercise the attribute of mercy. This holiness and justice, violated by man's sin, seemed to require a propitiation ; but where was this propitiation to be found ? Of what avail was the sacrifice of thousands of rams ? to what purpose flowed rivers of oil ? worse than in vain, the offering of the fruit of the body for the sin of the soul. On the subject of human guilt it still remained a painful mystery, " how God, *just* as well as merciful, could be just, and yet justify the sinner." The light which human reason shed on the attributes and will of the Maker of the universe, and on the obligations and rules of virtue, was obscured by the prejudices and passions of a corrupt heart and imagination. On the scenes of man's future existence there rested clouds which reason could not dispel. A revelation, therefore, that should cast certainty on these infinitely interesting topics, was the most invaluable gift that man could receive from his Maker.

But what was to be the evidence of the divine origin of this revelation ? Having respect to the divine nature and counsels, it must necessarily contain doctrines transcending the comprehension of human reason. Its internal excellence, therefore, could not be a complete evidence of its divine origin. This must be established by those miraculous works which divine power alone could effect. These miraculous works were performed in attestation of the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For all these events we have the testimony of eye-witnesses, sealed by their blood,

confirmed also by their own miracles, and handed down in records scrupulously scrutinized and guarded from age to age. The apostles testified to facts with which they were intimately acquainted. No delusion of the imagination could have made them believe that their Master, who was crucified, was risen again: no sinister motive of interest or ambition could have supported them under the unparalleled sufferings which they sustained in attestation of this fact: no power, but the power of the Most High, could have enabled them, in a short period, to subvert the Jewish temple and the Pagan altar, and on their ruins to erect the cross of a despised Nazarene. The Gospel of Christ was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness; and yet a few illiterate fishermen converted to the belief of this contemned Gospel myriads of Jews and Greeks. The Jews forsook their temple and flocked to the standard of him whom their fathers slew. The schools, long the boast of the Gentile philosophers, were deserted: human wisdom and human passions rendered homage to the cross. By what power was this wonderful conversion of the world effected? Surely only by the power of God. "Jesus Christ was a man approved of God among them by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God wrought in the midst of them, as they themselves also knew." Christian faith stands not in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God.

The intrinsic excellence of the Gospel, in its provision for all our spiritual necessities, is calculated to confirm our faith in it. For our release from the guilt of sin it provides a Saviour, who, as the Son of God, is mighty to save; and yet, bearing

our sins and carrying our sorrows, is touched with a feeling for our infirmities. For our deliverance from the dominion of sin, it affords the most ample means in those precepts which enlighten and direct us, and in that Holy Spirit which sanctifies and governs us. It displays, as our Deliverer from the grave, and our Guide to the mansions of immortality, Him who has vanquished death, and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. Our faith in it is then a rational assent to its truths; for this faith is founded on the highest moral evidence—human, confirmed by divine testimony—and the intrinsic excellence of the system thus externally established.

II. The excellence of Christian faith further consists in the exalted dispositions which are connected with the exercise of it.

As an assent to revealed truth on sufficient evidence, faith, in its most strict signification, is an act of the understanding; but when sincere and genuine, it implies, and calls into exercise, the most exalted virtues of the heart.

1. It implies an humble desire to know and to do the will of God.

A proud confidence in the power of human reason, and a disposition to reject every fact or doctrine, however attested or excellent, which transcends its comprehension, is not justified by the frail and dependent character of man; and is almost hostile both to the discovery and to the reception of truth. Opposed to this arrogant spirit, is that humility which is a principal constituent of faith; a profound sense of his weakness and dependence,

and an unreserved acknowledgment of the claims of his Maker and Judge to his homage and obedience; an earnest desire to know and to do the will of him whose will constitutes the happiness and perfection of all intelligent creation—these are the exercises of that intellectual humility which is an essential constituent of Christian faith, and which is so suitable to the character of man, as a creature dependent, in all his powers, in all his acts, in all his principles and hopes, on the Being who made him, and which enhance the excellence of that Christian faith of which they are principal constituents.

2. Faith also calls us to exercise another moral virtue—*trust*.

Under a sense of his weakness and guilt, man is prompted to rely on the wisdom, the power, and the mercy of his Maker, his Redeemer, and his Judge. In this trust consists the practical exercise and the consoling efficacy of faith. The Christian, in the exercise of faith, beholding the Saviour revealed in the Gospel, Jesus Christ the Son of God making atonement through his blood, and by his obedience and sufferings vindicating the justice and holiness of God, and relying on the merits of this Saviour for pardon and acceptance, enjoys the peace of a conscience reconciled to God. In the exercise of faith, the Christian confides in the divine strength which the Saviour offers him, diligently applies it, and enjoys the assurance of release from unholy passions, and of succour under all temptations. In the exercise of faith, the Christian relies on the compassion of that gracious Saviour who is touched with a feeling for his infirmities, and he is no longer depressed or intimidated

by the evils of the world. In the exercise of faith, the Christian relies on that Redeemer who rose from the grave and ascended to heaven, and is invested with almighty power, assuring victory to his followers; and he triumphs in the hope that he shall be conducted through the grave and gate of death to a joyful resurrection. In this reliance, then, the Christian finds fulness of consolation under all the weaknesses, the sorrows, and the sins of our corrupt and mortal nature. How exalted and valuable is that faith which leads to this consolatory and exalted reliance!

3. Faith also implies the exercise of love in its purest fervours and on the highest objects.

Love, occupying all the powers of the mind and the affections of the heart, to that God who so loved the world as to give his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but should have everlasting life—love to that blessed Redeemer who gave himself to suffering and death for our salvation, who still liveth to make intercession for us, to guide and to succour us, and who is preparing for us mansions of rest and glory in his Father's house. Love exercised on objects thus exalted, purifies and elevates the soul, and enhances the excellence of that faith which calls it forth.

III But the excellence of Christian faith will also appear from the *moral effects* which it produces.

What is it which brings down the high imaginations of man, which prostrates his elevated ideas of his own virtue and strength, and leads him, as a redeemed sinner, to receive salvation at the

foot of the cross?—That faith which believes that Jesus is the Son of God; that this Saviour, rejected of men, “is the brightness of the Father’s glory,” “God over all,” “mighty to save.”

What is it which subdues the corrupt propensities of the heart, and places God in the soul as its rightful Sovereign, and enlists all its affections in his service?—That faith “which worketh by love.”

What is it which quells passion, tames inordinate desire, effects what no human laws can effect, disarms revenge, and from being proud, sensual, corrupt, the slave of sin and Satan, makes man humble, holy, undefiled, the child of God?—That “faith which purifieth the heart.”

What is it which has inspired the Christian, when they would seduce or intimidate him from the service of his God, to despise the blandishments of pleasure, the threats of power, the terrors of persecution—what is it which has quenched the fires of the stake, and calmed the agonies of the rack?—That faith which “overcometh the world.”

Yes—What is it which gains a victory infinitely greater than those which have obtained glory for the conquerors of nations, victory over the world, its sins, its temptations, its pleasures, its sorrows? What is it which enables the Christian, when surrounded by every enjoyment alluring to the imagination and gratifying to the passions, to remember that he is the citizen of a better country; which excites him, when distress, poverty, and tribulation encompass him, to rejoice, knowing that they are working out for him an eternal weight of glory? What is it which even brightens the valley of the shadow of death, and leads the Christian triumphantly through this dread region, looking forward

to the glory which awaits him in the celestial realms beyond it?—That faith which is “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

In the words of an eloquent Christian Father, eulogizing the triumphs of faith—“Give me a man who is wrathful, reproachful, ungovernable, and with a few words of God I will render him as placid as a lamb. Give me a man covetous and niggardly, and an avaricious man, and I will return him to thee liberal, and distributing his money with a bountiful hand. Give me one that is timorous of grief and death; he shall despise all manner of torment. Give me one that is lustful, adulterous, and intemperate; you shall presently see him sober, chaste, and continent. Give me one that is cruel and thirsty of blood; his fury shall be immediately converted to piety and clemency. Give me one that is unjust, foolish, and criminal; and he shall presently be rendered just, prudent, and innocent.”

These are the triumphs of Christian faith—triumphs which natural religion never knew, which unassisted reason never could attain.

IV. For it is of importance that we should remember that true saving faith is rendered an operating principle by divine power—by the Holy Spirit of God.

Not only do the sacred writings ascribe all those miraculous powers which are the foundation of Christian faith to the agency of the Holy Spirit, but they represent the same Holy Spirit as opening the eyes of the understanding to discern, and the heart to receive, the wondrous things of God’s law, the great mysteries of redemption. The agency

of the Holy Spirit on our minds and hearts is incomprehensible ; but it is not, therefore, less a reality. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and we hear the sound thereof, but cannot tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth. So are the operations of the Spirit. In its influence on the understanding and the heart, the Holy Spirit is not overpowering ; for then it would destroy man's free agency, and subvert faith as a moral virtue. Its agency is moral and persuasive, aiding the operations of the understanding and the heart in discerning and receiving the great truths of redemption. The excellence then of your faith, Christians, is completed, by its being excited, cherished, strengthened, defended, and made the principle of active obedience by the co-operating power of the Holy Spirit of God. The influences of the Holy Spirit, conveyed to all men so far as is necessary to enable them to know and to do the will of their Maker, are secured to Christians by the instrumentality of the ministrations, sacraments, and ordinances of the church to which they must be united. For, my brethren, it is of importance that we should consider that the faith by which we are saved must be exercised in union with the church, the mystical body of Christ. Our Lord himself declares—"He that believeth and is *baptized*, shall be saved." By baptism we must be admitted into the church ; and thus united, in the exercise of faith, to Christ, its divine head, must derive from him spiritual nourishment, consolation, and strength, and with this his mystical body finally be exalted to that triumphant state on which our divine Head hath already entered. How fallacious, then, the opinion that faith alone, independently of our union with

the church, by the participation of its sacraments and ordinances from its authorized ministry, will be effectual to our salvation ! “ He that believeth and is baptized,” said our blessed Lord, “ shall be saved ;” and the language of his apostles uniformly proclaims, that through his body the church we are united to him, and in holy communion with this body shall finally enjoy the triumphs and glories of its divine Head.

The faith, then, by which we are saved, brethren, is such an assent of the understanding to the facts and truths of the Gospel as, through the influences of the Divine Spirit, calls forth the exercise of holy affections, and produces holy submission to the ordinances and commandments of God.

They whose faith thus worketh by love, and brings forth the fruits of holiness, have assured to them the pardon of their sins, (through the merits of that Saviour in whom they trust,) and the enjoyment of the favour of God ; for, “ justified by faith,” they have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. They are enriched with the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit ; for, in the language of the apostle, Christ by his Spirit dwells in their hearts, enriching them with divine wisdom and knowledge, purifying and sanctifying their souls, and leading them in the ways of God’s law, and in the works of his commandments. They obtain succour under temptation, so that theirs is the victory which overcometh the world—even their faith. They enjoy comfort under sorrow ; for, amidst all the changes and chances of this mortal life, their hearts are fixed on that Saviour whom, not having seen, they love ; they rejoice in the unfailing assurances of their divine Lord—“ None shall hurt

you, or make you afraid. All things shall work together for your good." And lastly, they who partake of true Christian faith are assured of victory over death, and everlasting life. "He that believeth in me," said Jesus, who is the resurrection and the life, "shall never die;" and in firm reliance on this gracious assurance, it may be the triumphant rejoicing of every true believer, in his last tremendous conflict, when nature, and all that nature can supply, fails him for ever—"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of glory." Blessed are they who are not seized, and yet have believed.

But what is the awful denunciation against unbelief? "He that believeth not," said Christ himself, "shall be damned"—"shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of God, and from the glory of his power." Just sentence; for he wilfully rejects the counsel of God for his salvation.

Professing Christians, let me beseech you to remember that this condemnation awaits not only those who reject Jesus Christ as their Saviour, but those who hold the faith in unrighteousness, those whose faith, not bringing forth good works, is dead. Examine then yourselves, whether you have that faith which worketh by love, which purifieth the heart, which overcometh the temptations of a sinful world, and which leads you to observe and keep the ordinances and commandments of God.

If you are Christians in deed and in truth, as well as in name and profession, be it your object to increase in that faith which is the source of all your virtues, and all your spiritual consolations and

joys. . Be it your increasing prayer and endeavour that your faith may abound more and more in all its holy fruits—love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, temperance. Let your faith, vigorous and lively, ascending to that heaven where your Saviour Christ hath gone before, raise you above the world—not above its duties, not above its pure enjoyments, the gifts of a gracious Providence—but above its sins, above an inordinate love of even its lawful pursuits and pleasures, above its temptations and its sorrows. Let your faith be the substance of things hoped for, and you shall enjoy on earth a foretaste of those glories prepared for you in your heavenly home. Let your faith be the evidence of things not seen, and you shall rejoice in that Saviour whom you see by the eye of faith, with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Especially let this faith, thus purifying, ennobling, and consolatory, be in lively exercise when you approach the table of your Lord. There are exhibited the agony and bloody sweat, the cross and passion of him who died for you, and dying, redeemed you; and there are pledged to you the merits of him who rose again, and ever liveth to intercede for you. Realize, then, the infinite compassion and the mighty power of your Redeemer, the Lord of hosts; and when you receive the pledges of his grace and mercy, you may rejoice in the assurance that you are heirs, through hope, of his everlasting kingdom.

SERMON XXX.

THE LIFE AND ACTS OF JESUS, DURING THE PERIOD
BETWEEN HIS RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION.

LUKE XXIV. 36.

Jesus himself stood in the midst of them.

WE have recently been engaged, my brethren, in celebrating those remarkable periods in the history of our Lord, when he suffered for our sins, when he was subjected to the dominion of the grave, and when he rose from the dead. The church, following successively the events of his history, now marks in her services that portion of it which intervened between his resurrection and his ascension. After our blessed Lord, in the fulfilment of prophecy, and in the performance of those stupendous acts by which our redemption was achieved, had obtained victory over death, and established his pretensions as the Son of God, a considerable period elapsed before he left the world, never to return to it but as its Judge, and ascending to the celestial courts, took possession of the glory which he had with the Father before the world was.

Having thus contemplated Christ as a Saviour suffering and dying on the cross, and in his power rising from the tomb, let me now direct your attention to him during that period which is subsequent to his resurrection, and prior to his ascension to heaven.

1. What was the corporeal nature of our Lord during that period?

2. What was his general occupation? and,

3. What were his most remarkable acts?

These are the inquiries on which I shall now submit to you a few remarks.

1. What was the corporeal nature of our Lord during the period which elapsed between his resurrection and his ascension to heaven?

This inquiry would seem unnecessary and extraordinary, if it were not the fact that our Saviour's corporeal nature, as it now subsists in his state of triumph and glory in heaven, is very different from its condition during his state of humiliation on earth. In this latter, mortal, frail, subject to the wants and the sufferings of humanity—in the former, immortal, impassible, perfect, invested with celestial splendour. It has therefore been made an inquiry—Of the properties of which of these conditions did the body of Christ partake during the period between his resurrection and ascension? Was his body, after he rose from the grave, in all respects the same body that suffered the wants and sorrows of humanity, and expired on the cross? or was it that glorified body in which the Redeemer is now seated on the throne of universal dominion?

The opinion has been advanced, that, after his resurrection, the Saviour having thrown aside the habiliments of mortality, had assumed that immortal body in which he shall reign for ever at the right hand of his Father. This opinion has been advanced and maintained with great force and ingenuity by the distinguished Bishop Horsley, who, in addition to unrivalled erudition and exalted ta-

lents, exhibited the rare union of the most bold originality in theological investigation with the most humble submission of his vigorous understanding and lofty fancy to the prescriptions of revealed truth. He supposes that a complete change was effected in our Lord's person after his resurrection; that his body—which, before this event, was “the mortal body of a man, suffering from fatigue and external violence, and needing the refection of food, of rest, and sleep, was confined by its gravity to the earth's surface, and was translated from one place to another by successive motion through the intermediate space—became, after his resurrection, the body of a man raised to life and immortality, and mysteriously united to divinity;—no longer, as when invested with a mortal body, requiring food for subsistence, and lodging for shelter and repose. On earth he had no longer any local residence: he was become the inhabitant of another region, from which he came occasionally to converse with his disciples.”

The objection to this theory (if it may be allowed to me to object to a theory advanced by so high an authority) is, that on the supposition that the body of Christ, after his resurrection, had undergone this change from mortal to immortal, from the body of suffering and humiliation to the body of triumph and glory, we should expect that this immortal body would have exhibited a portion at least of that splendour with which we are taught to believe that it shines forth in its celestial state. The transfiguration of Christ, when his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light, is considered an emblem of that blaze of splendour which unceasingly surrounds the glori-

fixed body of the Redeemer; and if he assumed *that* body after his resurrection, and if his habitation was in the glory of the highest heavens, why, when he descended to his interviews with his disciples, did he not bring with him some of the splendour of the courts which he had left? For aught that appears from his history, his appearance was the same as before his resurrection. And what still more weakens this theory, there is not the least intimation that the disciples regarded their Lord but as invested with a body partaking of all its former qualities. On various occasions he sat at meat with them, and on one occasion he did eat before them.

The evangelists and apostles, in their writings, assign the glorification of Christ, his assumption of a glorified and immortal body, not to the time of his resurrection, but to the period when he ascended to heaven, and for ever sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.

But this conjecture involves and affects no essential article of faith. The only fact on this subject of real importance is, that whatever was the body of the Saviour, whether of glory or humiliation, it was *the* body which enabled the disciples to identify their Lord. Satisfied, after his resurrection, by repeated interviews, and by personal converse with him, of the identity of his person, they were thus qualified to bear testimony to the fact of his resurrection from the dead.

We are now prepared for the second inquiry.

2. What were the general occupations of our Lord, in the interval between his resurrection and his ascension?

They still had reference to that great work which had occupied every moment of his life, which was the object of his death, and of which his resurrection was an important pledge—the great work of redemption, the establishment of that kingdom by which the dominion of sin and Satan was to be destroyed, and holiness, and happiness, and immortality dispensed to believers. In order to this, his first business was to convince his disciples of the identity of his person, and thus to satisfy them of the truth of his resurrection. For this purpose he appeared to the women who held him fast by the feet and worshipped him. He appeared to two of the disciples as they walked and went into the country. He conversed with the two disciples going to Emmaus, and sat at meat with them. He appeared to the eleven as they sat at meat, and showed his pierced hands, and feet, and side. He called to the incredulous Thomas—"Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing." He showed himself again to his disciples at the sea of Tiberias, and from their presence he was visibly taken up into heaven. It was impossible for them to doubt that the same Jesus, whom they had seen crucified and committed to the tomb, had risen from the dead. They who knew his person thoroughly, from his constant and intimate intercourse with them, were the best qualified to be the judges of its identity after his resurrection, and thus to be witnesses to the world of the truth of that event which is the foundation of all our hopes.

But our Lord, prosecuting the work of redemption in order to the establishment of his kingdom,

was occupied in the interval between his death and his resurrection, in unfolding to the disciples the *nature of that kingdom*, and in disclosing to them his *own gracious character and offices*. To the two disciples going to Emmaus we are told that he “expounded in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” To all the eleven he “opened their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures; showing how all things were fulfilled that were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning him.” And during the forty days in which he was seen of them, it is expressly said that “he spake to them concerning the things of the kingdom of God.” What an interesting period to them! What an important one to us! Then, my brethren, were laid the foundations of that kingdom which, subsequently reared by inspired apostles, dispenses to us the merits of the Redeemer’s blood, and that grace of his Holy Spirit by which we are sanctified, and thus prepared for entering on that more perfect state of the Redeemer’s kingdom, when, translated to heaven, all things shall be cast out of it that offend, and love, and peace, and holiness, and joy reign in it for ever.

Jesus, we are told, spake to his disciples of the things that were written by Moses, and in the law, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning himself. This, we may reverently suppose, was the interesting summary of his conversation with them:—

‘I am he, the Saviour and Deliverer, of whom Moses, and the prophets, and the Psalms bare witness, and to whose coming patriarchs, and prophets, and holy men looked forward with holy joy,

—the promised *seed*, that was to destroy the power of the adversary, and bless the families of the earth with a spiritual salvation—the *Shiloh*, who, as the messenger or sent of God, was to gather the nations into his spiritual fold—the *star* that, arising out of Jacob, was to be a light and deliverer of the people.

‘I was offered in a figure, when Isaac was laid on the altar; and as in a figure raised from the dead, when he was spared. My betrayal by my chosen brother and friend was presignified in the sale of Joseph into bondage by his brethren; and in his exaltation, and in his becoming a blessing to his brethren, by saving them alive and advancing them to honour, you behold the type and the pledge of my deliverance from suffering and death, to visit you with blessing and salvation.

‘In the blood of the paschal lamb, that saved the Israelites from the wrath of the destroying angel, you behold displayed the efficacy of my blood, as a lamb without blemish and without spot, taking away the sin of the world. A more perfect Priest than that of the Jewish tabernacle, I am to enter, not into the holy of holies of the material temple with the blood of bulls and of goats, but into the true holy of holies, the heaven of heavens, with my own blood, there to intercede for the race for whom it was shed.

‘Patriarchs, and prophets, and kings saw my day, and were glad; David spake of me, when he celebrated the King that was to be set upon the holy hill of Zion, to whom the heathen were to be given for an inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth for a possession; and when he spake of the praises of one who was fairer than the sons of

men, on whose lips grace was poured, and whom God had blessed for ever. I was that *Lord* of David to whom the Lord said, "Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool" And David, persecuted, suffering, betrayed, driven from his throne and kingdom, and again restored to power and honour, only prefigured me, the true Son of David, persecuted, suffering, betrayed, but now about to be clothed with glory and honour, and to take possession of a kingdom that shall never be moved. For of me, the true David, the spiritual King of the Israel of God, can it alone be said—"Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, nor wilt thou suffer thy Holy One to see corruption." "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom."

'Of me, born of a virgin in Bethlehem Ephrata, Emmanuel, Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace; of me, the Lamb that was to be led to the slaughter, and the Sheep that was to be dumb before its shearers, smitten, bruised, wounded for the transgressions of the people, and cut off from the land of the living—all the prophets bore witness. And in my resurrection from the dead, and my exaltation to the throne of everlasting dominion, I fulfil the predictions concerning that mighty King who should come, bringing salvation to the ends of the earth, and saying, with a voice that shakes the dominions of death and the grave—"O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction."

'Be not slow of heart, then, to believe that I am he of whom all the prophets testified, the Messen-

ger of the covenant, the Desire of all nations, the Saviour, the Mighty One of Jacob. And that spiritual kingdom founded by my merits and preserved by my grace, I am now about to commission you to proclaim, and to establish in the world.'

3. The *authority* with which, for this purpose, our Lord invested his disciples, and the commission he bestowed on them, were the *principal acts* which he performed in the interval between his resurrection and his ascension—the consideration of which was to constitute the last head of this discourse.

Had it pleased our Lord, as the Author and Finisher of our faith—to whom was assigned, by the Almighty Father, the whole work of our salvation, he might not only, as he has done, have inspired his apostles to commit to writing all the great truths of our redemption, but left these inspired records, under the guidance of his Holy Spirit, to produce their efficacy on mankind, in their single individual capacity. But it did not so please him. And, without digressing into a detail of the reasons of a different constitution of the dispensation of grace, it is my purpose now only to impress on you the *fact*, that our divine Lord and Master did not leave his followers with no tie but that which arises from faith in his written word. He has united them in a kingdom, of which he is the *Ruler*, and collected them in a *body*, of which he is the *head*; and they grow up into him in all things, not merely by the efficacy, powerful as it is, of his word enforced by the Divine Spirit, but by the *administrations* of those *officers* of his kingdom to whom he has committed the ministry of recon-

ciliation, by the *grace* of that *baptism* by which they are admitted into his body, and mystically united to him, its head; by the *power* of that *body and blood* by which, in the holy supper, they are nourished and strengthened unto everlasting life; and by the social prayers and ordinances which, offered and received in his name, have the promise—"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

This social *quality* of the dispensation of grace, its eminent characteristic, the Saviour constituted, when, before his ascension, he conferred the memorable commission on his disciples—"As my Father sent me, even so send I you. Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained. All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved. And lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world."

Thus is constituted a spiritual society, of which, deriving their power from him to whom all power is given in heaven and on earth, the apostles, and those to whom, to the end of the world, their authority should be transmitted, are recognised as the spiritual rulers, and into which all to whom the Gospel should be preached are to be admitted by baptism.

Our blessed Lord, then, in that momentous period when he was occupied with unfolding to his disciples the great mystery of redemption, consti-

tuted a social body, a kingdom, a church, which was to be the channel of his covenanted mercies to the world. It follows that the *social* character of his followers, their union in his mystical body, is a fundamental part of the plan of redemption. The very first description of Christians which we have in the Acts of the Apostles, is, that they "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." Communion with the church, by maintaining fellowship with the apostles, by breaking of bread, that is, partaking of the Lord's supper, and by prayers, by attending the public worship authoritatively celebrated, is placed in the same rank with continuing steadfast in apostolic doctrine. And still more strongly to impress the fundamental importance of communion with the mystical body of Christ, it is recorded in another part of the Acts of the Apostles, that "the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." Almost every page of the apostolic epistles inculcate the doctrine, that Christians, in the exercise of faith, are, by communion with the church, united to him who is the head of the body, and thus derive from him pardon, grace, and salvation.

Imperfect, then, my brethren, is every view of the Gospel dispensation, and erroneous, it would seem, every measure which has reference to its propagation, which does not recognise this as one of its distinguishing features. *Where* the church and kingdom of God is to be found, *where* it subsists in its greatest purity, are inquiries of primary moment with every believer in the sacred volume: they are inquiries which every individual availing himself of the best means of information, must

make for himself; and honestly making it, he shall not fail, even though he may be in error, of being accepted by that gracious Master, who is not strict to mark what, through involuntary ignorance or infirmity, may be thought or done amiss.

We, my brethren, think that the church to which we belong possesses the divinely constituted ministry, the doctrine, sacraments, and worship of the kingdom of the Redeemer. In all our efforts, then, for the salvation of our own souls, or for the salvation of the souls of others, let us recognise, as a fundamental principle, *communion with the church*, the continuing steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. Tempering zeal with humility, firmness with mildness, and attachment to our own principles with charity for others, let us believe that we best discharge our duty to our divine Lord, and best advance the interests of that kingdom which, before his ascension, he established, when our prayers, our exertions, our contributions, our time, our talents are devoted to the prosperity and extension of that church whose divine character and apostolic claims we humbly assert and maintain.

But let us remember that obvious rule of right—"Of those to whom much is given, much will be required." Planted as we are, by the good providence of God, in a part of his spiritual vineyard in which we are plentifully favoured with the means of spiritual improvement, abundant is the fruit which we shall be expected to bring forth. That Jesus who, we believe, rose from the dead and established, before his ascension, his church and kingdom, and who now sits in heaven as its Head and Ruler, will come to be the Judge of the world,

How great should be our solicitude, that when he comes, as he may, by his messenger death, in a moment which we think not of, he may find us doing his will, walking blameless in his commandments and ordiuances, waiting in faith and patience for his coming.

Lord and Master, may we then enter into the paradise of God, and finally have our perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul, in thy eternal and everlasting glory.

SERMON XXXI.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING PARTAKERS OF THE HOLY GHOST.

HEBREWS vi. 4.

Made partakers of the Holy Ghost.

THE doctrine of the influences of the Holy Spirit upon the human soul, is a fundamental doctrine of the Gospel. The most superficial observer of human nature must acknowledge and deplore its frailty and corruption. The understanding is liable to error, the affections tend to excessive indulgence, the will is averse to that which is good, and numerous are the temptations to which, thus weak and corrupt in his understanding, his will, and his affections, man is exposed in this evil world. Hence results the necessity of divine agency in his restoration to truth and virtue, and his victory over temptation. What this divine agency shall be, is a point purely of revelation, resting on the determination of the Almighty Being who made us, and on whom we are entirely dependent. In the sacred writings we find this divine agency, so essential to us in our present fallen and weak condition, revealed in the influences of the Holy Spirit, the gift of which, the purchase of Christ's merits, and the consequence of his ascent into heaven, the church this day commemorates. And it is the language of inspired apostles, that we are not sufficient of

ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves, but that our sufficiency is of God; and that, through the sanctification of the Spirit, we are established in holiness, and prepared for heaven.

In accordance with Scripture, the agency of the Divine Spirit is a prominent doctrine of our church. "We have no power to do good works, pleasant and acceptable unto God," (this is her language in one of her articles,) "but by the grace of God giving us a good will, and working with us when we have that good will." Accordingly she prays to God, that as, "by his special grace preventing us," (going before us,) "he puts into our minds good desires, so, by his continual help we may bring the same to good effect." And she directs us to offer earnest supplication to God to "cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit."

On the subject of the influences of the Divine Spirit many erroneous and dangerous opinions prevail, against which it is essential that Christians should be put on their guard.

Since, then, the operations of the Holy Spirit are thus essential, it is of importance that we correctly understand the nature of these operations on our hearts.

1. The operations of the Divine Spirit on our minds are in accordance with our intellectual and moral powers; and therefore are not violent, but gentle and persuasive.

It is an error to suppose that the operations of the Divine Spirit are overpowering and violent.

When, indeed, men were endowed with miraculous powers, over which they had no control, and

in which they acted as they were impelled, the operations of the Spirit were sometimes violent; denoted by "a rushing mighty wind," and by "tongues of fire." But when men, as moral agents, are to be reclaimed from sin and restored to holiness, then the mild influences of the Holy Spirit may be aptly denoted by the gentleness of the dove, under which emblem he descended on our blessed Lord. Violent impulses upon the mind would be incompatible with its freedom, with man's condition as a moral agent, and with the character of God as a moral Governor. The gentle influx of divine illumination and grace on the soul, preserves it in the possession of that freedom which is essential to man as a moral agent, and which might be impaired by any violent impressions. God will not, by the operations of the Spirit, violate that constitution of our nature which he hath established; and every man's consciousness assures him that he is free in all his volitions and determinations.

In his character as a moral Governor, the Almighty, therefore, deals with men by the force of motives, by the hopes of reward and the fears of punishment, addressed to their understanding and to their affections. This is the mode, and the only mode, by which free agents can be governed. But if these motives were violently applied to the mind by the influences of the Holy Spirit, they would no longer resemble motives operating on free agents, but physical forces impelling machines. In the process of conversion from sin to holiness, doubtless strong emotions often fill the breast of the sinner. Remorse for his sins, and holy apprehension of God's judgments, often agitate his con-

science. The enormity of his transgressions, the greatness of his ingratitude to his gracious Maker and Benefactor, and his presumption in so long defying divine justice impressed upon his conscience, he finds himself under the sentence of perdition, and terror convulses his soul. Miserable man! guilty sinner, thou hast cause to mourn. Thy God, thy Sovereign, thy Benefactor, thy Judge offended; the mercy, the grace, and the love of thy Saviour contemned; thy immortal soul polluted, and in danger of eternal perdition—thou hast indeed cause to mourn. But when thy terrors become the terrors of despair, they are the result of thine own weak and disordered nature; they are not the necessary attendants on genuine conviction of sin; they are not the operations of the Spirit of God. For while it is the office of this Spirit to convince of sin, it is also his gracious office to direct the troubled soul to that blood of atonement, faith in which allays its fears, and sooths it with the peaceful emotions of humble hope.

Be not distressed, Christians, if your penitence has not been accompanied with violent agitations of mind and terrors of conscience. Sorrow for your sins, deep and unfeigned sorrow, you must indeed have felt, or you have no pretensions to the character of a true penitent. But violence is no characteristic of genuine grief. If, under a sense of your guilt and unworthiness, you have had recourse, in humble confession and prayer, to the throne of your heavenly Father, and found consolation and peace in reliance on his mercy through Jesus Christ, you may rest satisfied that your sorrow for sin, destitute as it may have been of violent agitations of soul, has yet been quickened by divine

grace. Not in the strong wind, not in the earthquake, not in the fire, but in the still small voice, does the Spirit of God, gentle as the dove, speak to the soul.

Another error on this subject is, that the operations of the Divine Spirit are sudden and complete in their effects.

2. The operations of the Divine Spirit, in our sanctification and renovation, are not sudden, but gradual and progressive.

The heart of the impenitent sinner may indeed be suddenly struck with conviction; some providential dispensation, nay, even some trivial occurrence, may be the instrument, under the agency of the Divine Spirit, of the sudden awakening of the sinner. So far it is true that the operations of the Spirit are sometimes sudden; for where the confirmed sinner is awakened, the period may be distinctly marked. But all the subsequent operations of the Holy Spirit, in the work of renovation, are gradual and progressive. The disclosure to the mind, of the evil and guilt of sin, of the all-sufficiency of the merits and grace of Christ, of the excellence of the plan of salvation through this divine Mediator; the love of the Christian to his God and Saviour; his humble trust in the merits and atonement of his divine, and compassionate, and all-sufficient Redeemer; his victory over his sinful passions; his advance in the attainment of the Christian virtues, humility, meekness, patience, righteousness—all which are produced by the agency of the Holy Spirit, and must be gradual and progressive. If indeed man's conversion from sin to holiness be instantaneous; if divine grace,

by one powerful operation, sanctified his soul and established it in holiness, how unnecessary and absurd appear the numerous exhortations of Scripture! "See that ye receive not the grace of God in vain," is an apostolic exhortation. But this result is impossible, if, at its first operation, the dominion of divine grace be fully established in the soul. "Grow in grace" is another apostolic exhortation; but if the dominion of grace in the soul be instantaneous and complete, the exhortation is destitute of meaning. In fine, the whole system of exhortations, of threats and promises, implies that our progress in the change from sin to holiness, in acquiring the virtues and habits of the new man in Christ Jesus, is gradual, and dependent, under the blessing of the Holy Spirit, on our own diligence and watchfulness, on our faithful use of the appointed means. Let us beware, then, of the delusion, that our renovation, our establishment in the Christian graces and virtues, is a sudden and instantaneous operation. What then can be the necessity of circumspection and diligence, in order to advance in all holy dispositions, and in all good works? This notion of the sole and instantaneous operation of the Divine Spirit is calculated to excite self-confidence and presumption. If the great work of sanctifying our corrupt nature, and establishing in our souls holy principles and dispositions, be at once effected by the sole and powerful impulse of the Holy Spirit, what necessity is there for our own exertions? Then the warfare with our sinful passions, the constant struggle against temptation, the earnest endeavour to obtain the mastery over every evil thought and propensity—the essential duties of the Christian, which so

many exhortations of the sacred writings urge and enforce—must appear unnecessary. No, my brethren, our victory over our sinful passions, our warfare with temptation, our establishment in holiness, gradually advancing, will never be complete during the course of our mortal pilgrimage. In every stage of it, the world will assail us by its temptations, will allure us by its corrupting pleasures. Our great adversary will be on the watch to seize some unwary moment to seduce us into sin, and our treacherous hearts will too often yield. Our only refuge is in prayer and watchfulness—prayer to God, from whom only cometh our help, to nourish and strengthen the good desires which his grace has excited, to quicken and advance our progress in holiness and virtue—and *watchfulness*, lest temptation, in some of its various and seductive forms, lead us into sin, and retard our progress in the Christian life, if not finally frustrate our salvation.

For, my brethren, it is of the utmost importance to recollect that the influences of the Holy Spirit are not irresistible.

The contrary opinion cannot be reconciled with that character of man, as free to choose the evil and refuse the good, which constitutes him a moral agent, and renders him the just subject of commendation or censure, of reward or punishment. If the grace which puts into his mind good desires, which purifies his affections, which stirs up his will, and enables him to bring his good desires and resolutions to good effect, be irresistible, not in any degree subject to his control, it is evident that man is not, in any sense, the master of his own actions. He then differs from an ingenious piece of mecha-

nism only in the circumstance that the irresistible force which impels this is physical, while the omnipotent power which controls him is moral. The effect, however, in both cases, is certain and unavoidable—the power, in both cases, supreme, and irresistibly impelling. There is no difference between natural and moral inability, between physical and moral necessity, but in name: they both effectually preclude freedom of choice, and are incompatible with free agency. But this exalted characteristic of our nature our own consciousness will never permit us to doubt; no metaphysical reasoning can ever persuade him who attends to the movements of his own mind, to believe that any secret and irresistible power controls the determination of his will and impels his actions. The Author of our nature, therefore, can never be the Author of a doctrine which plainly and directly contradicts one of its essential principles—free agency.

This strong presumptive argument against the doctrine of irresistible grace derives conclusive force from the sacred oracles; for there we find the doctrine opposed by the essential characteristics of the plan of salvation, which freely offers unmerited blessings to sinful man on certain *conditions* or *qualifications*, to perform or acquire which divine aids are offered to him, everlasting rewards promised him, and never-ending punishments threatened him. Operate on man irresistibly—maintain that, in the great work of his spiritual renovation, divine grace acts with certainty and with resistless force, and you not only change the operations of the intellect into the movements of matter, but you stamp with inconsistency and

absurdity the urgent exhortations, the interesting promises, and the alarming threatenings of the word of God. No; the doctrine which leads to these *impious* conclusions is explicitly disclaimed by the oracles of truth: in them we are directed to “make our calling and election *sure*,” our election, therefore, is not absolute—we are not irresistibly called. We are exhorted “not to resist the Spirit of God;” the Spirit of God may therefore be resisted. We are warned “not to quench the Spirit;” the Spirit, therefore, may be quenched. Does this scriptural doctrine, that we may finally fall from grace, fill us with apprehensions and fears that, through the frailty and corruption of our nature, this may be our lamentable condition? But God, who bestows on us his grace, is as compassionate as he is omnipotent. He will not leave us, till we wilfully tear ourselves from his paternal arms. He will cherish and revive the spark of divine grace in our souls, till we wholly extinguish it by our obstinate and long-continued transgressions. He will not forsake us, till, hardening our hearts under his repeated warnings and expostulations, we prove that we deserve the sentence which his infinite justice will pronounce, and we are left to eat of the fruit of our own way, and to be filled with our own devices.

As the influences of the Divine Spirit are not irresistible, neither are they *sensible*—they are not to be distinguished from the acts of our own minds—we know them only by their fruits.

The Holy Spirit enlightens the understanding, regulates the will, and purifies the affections. All this holy change in our souls is produced by a powerful indeed, but, except as to its effects, im-

perceptible agency. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and we hear the sound thereof, but cannot tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth." We know the operation of the wind only by its *effects*. In like manner, according to this analogy, which our blessed Lord employed, the operations of the Holy Spirit are inscrutable, and to be known only by their *fruits*. This is a standard of judgment which cannot deceive us. The possession of the fruits of the Spirit is an infallible evidence of his sanctifying presence in our souls. By no other criterion can we determine whether we are led by the Spirit. No fervour of feeling is to be trusted but that which animates our love, our confidence, our hope in our God and Saviour; and these are among the principal fruits of the Spirit. The Scriptures of truth lay down the infallible standard—"The fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." Let us test ourselves by this standard. Are our hearts animated and enlivened by supreme love to God and by love to mankind, by holy joy in the divine mercy and favour? Redeemed from all wrathful passions, are our souls the seat of peace? Are we long-suffering under the evils and provocations of the world, gentle and easy to be entreated? Does the principle of goodness inspire and animate all our actions? Is our intercourse with our fellow-men regulated by fidelity? In our tempers, in our conversation, and in our conduct, are we meek and lowly? And does temperance regulate the indulgence of our lawful appetites and passions? The soul, where these graces reign, must be the seat of that Divine Spirit whose agency alone can produce them. We are not then

to expect any sensible demonstration of his presence, any overwhelming illumination or display of his power. When we crucify the flesh, with its affections and lusts—when we are transformed by the renewing of our minds—when love to our God and Saviour, and love to our fellow-men, are the ruling principles of our hearts—when we study in all things to keep a conscience void of offence, and in simplicity and godly sincerity to have our conversation in the world—then we may be assured that we are led by the Spirit of God; and then we may rejoice in his holy comfort, in his all-powerful guidance and protection.

Lastly. It is an error to suppose that the influences of the Divine Spirit are not regular and uniform.

They are not capriciously and arbitrarily bestowed; given at one time or place, and withheld at other times and from other places—given to one individual, and withheld from others, according to the unknown and sovereign decree of God. In the Old Testament, indeed, there are predictions made of special “outpourings” of God’s Holy Spirit; but these predictions were fulfilled when, under the Gospel dispensation, the Holy Spirit was given, with his miraculous as well as ordinary graces, to the church. So far as is necessary to enable them to work out their salvation, divine grace flows from the gracious Parent of the universe to all the fallen race of men. But the influences of the Holy Spirit, in a more abundant and particular manner, are enjoyed by all the members of the Christian church, that body of Christ for which he purchased this Spirit, and on which he

abundantly bestows it, and which it powerfully animates. All who by baptism are admitted into this church, enjoy the privilege of the Holy Spirit to raise them from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, to enable them to walk worthy of their Christian calling, to excite, and cherish, and strengthen the spiritual life, to sanctify them in soul and body. Exercising penitence and faith, they receive further supplies of the Divine Spirit in the "laying on of hands," (the apostolic ordinance of confirmation,) and in the sacrament of the Lord's supper; and in the worship of the church, as well as in private meditation and prayer, does God fulfil his gracious promise, and give his Holy Spirit to those who thus humbly ask it. In proportion to the sincerity and constancy with which we wait upon the Lord in humble prayer and in the ordinances of his church, will be the measure of the grace which he bestows. But if we fail diligently and faithfully to use the appointed means, God will withhold the quickening and renovating influences of his grace. On the theory, that God bestows his Spirit, not according to the diligence and fidelity with which we ask for, and seek it in the use of the appointed means, but according to his sovereign pleasure, we should impute to him a caprice unworthy of his goodness—we should attribute to him all that blindness, and insensibility, and sin in man, which result from the absence of that divine Monitor, and Sanctifier, and Guide; and we should destroy the most powerful motives to use those means which he has enjoined.

My brethren, the doctrine of the agency of that divine Sanctifier, whose descent upon the church

we this day celebrate, in the view which has been exhibited to you, so far from being visionary and enthusiastic, does not present any thing which our sober judgment will condemn. That the omnipotent Being who made us, does exercise a powerful but invisible influence over our minds, without violating our free agency, presents no difficulty to those who acknowledge his supreme and almighty dominion. That the frailty and corruption of our nature, in its aversion to good, and its liability to temptation, render this divine and holy agency necessary for us, no person acquainted with his own heart, and with the world, will deny; and that this divine agency is exerted by the Holy Ghost, one of the persons of the Godhead, is a truth of revelation which, however incomprehensible, our knowledge of the divine nature, and of our own minds, does not enable us to disprove. The administration of the grace of the Spirit is entirely rational, orderly, and sober. This grace is to be obtained by the diligent use of appointed means; and it produces in the soul that yields to its celestial sway, those virtues which are the ornament of our nature, which reason approves and honours, and which will constitute the never-ending bliss of our future existence.

Seek then, brethren, these influences of the Divine Spirit with diligence, with constancy, with supreme solicitude: seek them in humble prayer, in the worship and ordinances of Christ's church; especially in that holy supper where the church now calls you to celebrate the great event when the Holy Spirit was conferred. Unless we are the subjects of their renovating power, we are

estranged from God, the source of holiness and felicity; we are in bondage to sin, and under the sentence of condemnation. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature," is an inspired declaration; and the only sure evidence of this renovation is our exhibition, in their purity and power, of the fruits of the Spirit.

SERMON XXXII.

THE DIFFERENT WAYS IN WHICH WE MAY QUENCH THE
SPIRIT OF GOD.

EPHESIANS iv. 30.

Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God.

THE church this day commemorates an event to which she owes her establishment, her stability and glory, and to which her members must ascribe all the holy graces and virtues which animate them.

The Holy Ghost, descending as at this time on the apostles, and releasing them from the gross prejudices which led them to regard the Jewish law as a system which was to last for ever, inspired them with a perfect and lively comprehension of that great mystery which was to be made known unto the Gentiles, "Christ, the wisdom and the power of God," "God manifest in the flesh," for the salvation of the whole world. Cloven tongues, as of fire, sitting upon them, were an emblem of the gift which then endued them with the power of speaking different languages, that thus they might carry the glad tidings of salvation into all the nations of the world; and the rushing mighty wind forcibly denoted those miraculous powers by which they commanded the operations of nature, and thus attested that God was with them. The Spirit of wisdom, of understanding, of strength, which came upon them from on high, enabled them to plant

throughout the world the cross of their Saviour, triumphant over its learning, its power, and its persecution.

But not only these mighty and splendid gifts, by which the apostles ruled all nature, did the Divine Spirit confer, he this day descended on his church, to abide with it for ever, enlightening, renewing, strengthening, and consoling its members.

The doctrine of communion between the mind and the Divine Being who formed it, though fully made known only in the Gospel of Christ, is so agreeable to reason, that it has been admitted and cherished by the wise and good in all ages. Man feels so sensibly his dependence—so many circumstances perpetually remind him of his weakness—so many objects in the world around him act upon his senses, and call up, in resistless force, those passions that war against his reason and his conscience, that he is prompted to invoke the aid of that superior Power who made and who sustains him, and who, therefore, can have access to every faculty and feeling of his soul.

What unbiassed reason and nature seek, the Scriptures reveal. That Being whose spiritual and infinite essence is past finding out, and whom, therefore, we should adore as he has displayed himself to us, is revealed as subsisting in three co-equal and co-eternal persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost—each divine, infinite, and eternal, and together incomprehensibly constituting one God. And in the stupendous and mysterious agency which each exerts in man's salvation, it is the Father who, being the infinite and eternal fountain of Deity, gave the Son to be incarnate for our redemption; it is the Son who, full of grace and truth, redeems us from

our bondage to sin, Satan, and death; and it is the Holy Ghost who sanctifies the powers and affections of our fallen nature, and thus renders us meet for the glory which Christ, the Son, hath gone before to prepare for us.

Various, powerful, and beneficent are the offices of the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Ghost:—the *quicken*ing Spirit, that penetrates with conviction the hardened or secure conscience—the *consol*ing Spirit, that applies the promises of divine mercy through a Saviour's merits—the *enlighten*ing Spirit, that sheds light on the darkened understanding—the *direct*ing and *govern*ing Spirit, that influences the determinations of our perverse wills—the *renov*ating and *sanctify*ing Spirit, that purifies our carnal affections; without him we can do nothing.

“I will pray the Father,” said our blessed Lord, “and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth:” “he shall guide you into all truth.” “The Spirit of God dwelleth in you.” “God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts.” “According to his mercy, God saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost.” “God hath chosen us to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit.” “It is the Spirit that helpeth our infirmities.” “The fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth.”

The sacred writings thus stating most prominently the doctrine of the existence and agency of the Holy Spirit, we need not wonder at the important station which this doctrine holds in our church. To be born of the Spirit, she lays down as the characteristic of all the true children of God. ‘She

teaches us to pray that, by this Spirit, we may have a right understanding in all things; that, by his inspiration, we may think those things that are good, and, by his merciful guiding, may perform the same; that, by this same blessed inspiration, God would cleanse the thoughts of our hearts; that this same Spirit may, in all things, direct and rule our hearts; and that, by this Holy Spirit, we may daily be renewed. It is impossible sincerely to unite in the prayers of our church, and not believe or realize the agency of the Divine Spirit on the soul. Let us beware, brethren, of doubting or neglecting a doctrine thus prominently set forth as a cardinal doctrine of the plan of salvation through a divine Saviour and Sanctifier. The Scriptures assure us that the Holy Spirit dwelleth in us, the Author and Preserver of our spiritual life, and we should gratefully adore God's wonderful condescension and goodness in making us the temples of the Holy Ghost. We should cherish his gracious influences and his consoling suggestions, and yield to his enlightening and sanctifying energies. We should take heed that we do not despite to the Spirit of grace, lest, provoked by our obstinate rejection of the inestimable gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit, God swear in his wrath that we shall not enter into his rest.

For it is a truth, which renders this doctrine of the agency of the Divine Spirit in all respects sober and rational, and clears it from the charge of being enthusiastic, that his operations entirely accord with the movements of our own minds—are not to be distinguished from them—and may be resisted. When we check evil thoughts, when we resist evil purposes, when we subdue sinful passions—and on

the contrary, when we think a good thought, when we resolve to do what is right, when all our affections are in pious and virtuous exercise, we are not conscious of any agency within us, but that of our understandings, our wills, and our affections, and are also conscious of our perfect control over them. It is on the faith of revelation solely that we ascribe the quickening, predominating, and controlling influence in all our good thoughts, resolutions, and feelings, to the incomprehensible but powerful energy of the Spirit of God.

The various offices which the Holy Spirit sustains towards us, impose on us corresponding duties, by the neglect of which we resist and grieve him. The remainder of this discourse, then, will be usefully employed in considering *in what way we may incur the guilt of resisting and grieving the Spirit of God, and the enormity and danger of this conduct.*

It is the office of the Holy Spirit to *enlighten*, to *sanctify*, and to *console*. In each of these respects we may incur the guilt of rejecting and grieving him.

1. We may grieve him, by obstinately resisting his illuminations, or by our inattention to them.

“No man,” says our blessed Lord, “knoweth the things of God, save the Spirit of God.” It is the office of the Holy Spirit to conduct all the divine dispensations to the world, to declare the counsels and to unfold the revelations of God’s will. It is his primary office, as the Saviour promised, to lead Christians into the knowledge of divine truth, to open their understandings, to comprehend the hidden things of God’s law, and by

his secret, but powerful influences, to give them that spiritual discernment by which they see, and acknowledge, and feel the nature, the excellence, and the glory of divine truth.

Brethren, do we then honour the Holy Spirit, as the dispenser of all saving knowledge, the almighty Agent by which God reveals his will and applies it to the heart? Sensible of the blindness and weakness of our understandings, and of the power of prejudice and of passion to obscure and enslave them—lamenting our aversion to divine truth, and our incompetency to discern, and duly to value the excellence, and importance, and glory of spiritual objects—do we thankfully look to the illuminating guidance of that Spirit by whom only we can have a right judgment in all things? Discarding a vain confidence in the powers of our own intellect, and humbling its aspiring claims, do we habitually and reverently recur to the word of God as the only source and standard of divine knowledge? Is every deduction of our own reason measured by this unerring rule? Is every system which human genius may have fondly formed and cherished, when opposed by the clear and explicit revelation of God's holy word, without hesitation, abandoned and renounced? Are we willing, and do we constantly endeavour to bring every aspiring thought and every lofty imagination into captivity to the will of God, who has a supreme claim to the homage of our intellect, and whose will is that perfect and eternal source of *right* which every created intelligence is bound to adore? Do we hear or read his holy word with minds deeply impressed with reverence for his glorious perfections, with devout gratitude for the gracious mani-

festation of his will in the Scriptures of his truth, and with a sacred resolution to receive and cherish that holy will, whatever fond opinions it may require us to renounce, whatever passions it may command us to subdue? Do we earnestly, and constantly, and sincerely pray that this Divine Spirit may illumine our understandings, and subduing their pride and prejudices, impress on them the awful importance and value of divine truths? Do we receive and cherish with attention and zeal the holy inspirations of this sacred Guide, leading us to the knowledge of truth and duty by the deductions of reason, the admonitions of conscience, and the express declarations of the word of God? Do we cherish that humble distrust of the strength of our own reason, that lively and supreme love of divine truth, which are the only dispositions which will lead us to receive and to value the illuminations of the Holy Spirit?

My brethren, these are questions of high importance. The Divine Spirit will convey his enlightening influences only to the mind that is prepared with humility to receive them, and with diligent and devoted attention to cherish them. Obstinate and wilful blindness he will not remove. The good seed which he sows, scattered on a light and superficial mind occupied with vain and trifling pursuits, will not take deep and abiding root; or, however eager and sincere the attention which at first receives and cherishes it, it may be afterwards choked by the weeds of prejudice and passion. An indolent indifference to divine truth and to our spiritual interests, an obstinate insensibility to the admonitions of the Holy Spirit, will provoke him to withdraw his enlightening influences; and then pride

and prejudice gaining dominion over our minds, they will embrace and cherish *error* with a zeal and resolution which truth cannot excite; and following their own fallacious dictates, instead of the unerring light of the Divine Spirit, we shall recede further and further from God and salvation, until we become confirmed in spiritual blindness and insensibility. Oh! deplorable condition! in which the soul is deserted by God, the infinite source of truth, and left to the ruinous sway of its own pride, and prejudices, and passions. Spirit of grace, let not our frequent resistance of thy inspirations, our indolence and insensibility under thy admonitions, provoke thee to seal us up in error and impiety! O God, measure thy dispensations to us, not by our deserts, but by thy infinite mercies, and keep us ever, by the light and power of thy Spirit, in the knowledge, the love, and service of *thee*.

2. It is the office of the Holy Spirit to *sanctify* our corrupt nature; and in this respect we may resist and grieve him, by our wilful impenitence and perseverance in sin.

“God hath chosen us to salvation,” saith the voice of inspiration, “through sanctification of the Spirit.” He saves us by “the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost.” The conscience must be purged from dead works to serve the living God, the dominion of sin in our hearts must be subdued, and the image of God, in righteousness and holiness, must be restored in the soul, by the power and operations of the Spirit of God. It is indeed a dictate of reason, that the dominion of the passions of our sinful nature can be subverted, and the sway of those graces estab-

lished within us that will assimilate us to God and prepare us for heaven, only by an almighty power.

But it is also a dictate of reason, as well as a declaration of the word of God, that, treating us as reasonable and accountable agents, "his Spirit will not always strive with man." If we neglect and despise his warnings—if we disregard his admonitions—if we resist his holy and renovating influences—if, when he would convince us of our guilt, we quench the conviction in sensual gratifications—if, when he would redeem us from the dominion of unholy passions, we cling to the indulgence of them as our highest happiness—if, when he would restore the image of God in our souls, we are insensible of the glory and value of the gift, and prefer remaining under the degrading dominion of the principles and passions of our fallen nature—if we thus resist and grieve him, can we expect that he will force on us blessings which we despise—that by miraculous energy he will convert us? Oh! how great is their presumption and folly, who suppose that, while wilfully impenitent, that, while obstinately persevering in the ways of sin, they will enjoy the pure and renovating presence of the Holy Spirit of God!

Brethren, divine grace is tendered to us, to redeem us from our miserable bondage to sin; and shall we not ask, with earnestness and perseverance, for the inestimable gift—for the means of purifying our nature, and exalting it to immortal holiness and glory? Is the blessed Spirit of God, with all his divine graces and consolations, waiting to take possession of our hearts—even condescending to sue for admittance into them—and shall we disregard his solicitations? Who can

describe the guilt of resisting and grieving the Spirit of God? Yet this aggravated guilt *he* incurs, who continues in sin, in bondage to the world. That he may be redeemed from the evils of his corrupt nature, that he may be sanctified and restored to the favour of God, and fitted for immortal felicity, it is required that he earnestly seek the aids of divine grace, that he submit himself to its guidance, that, by sincere penitence and lively faith, he cherish its sacred influences; and the impenitent sinner not only refuses to implore the influence of this divine Sanctifier, but, obstinately continuing in sin, resists, and grieves, and does despite to him.

Will almighty Power be always thus resisted? Spirit of God, shall thy grace be always thus contemned? Ah! "God will arise to judgment:" he will "avenge himself of his adversaries." "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts."

Christians, who have improved to your conversion from sin, and establishment in piety and virtue, the sanctifying grace of God, take heed lest, by inattention, or by confidence and presumption, ye fall into sin, and grieve the Holy Ghost whose temple ye are. Remember, the only evidence *you* have *yourselves*, the only proof you can give to the world of your change of nature, of the presence of the Holy Spirit within you, is your bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit in holiness and righteousness of life. Watch and pray, then, lest ye fall into temptation, and forfeit your claim to his holy guidance and aids.

3. *Lastly.* It is the office of the Holy Spirit to console and succour us; and in this respect we

may grieve him, when, depending on the world and our own resolution, we condemn his consolations and succours.

Most absurd, indeed, and criminal, when *almighty* Power is ready to succour us, to depend on our own strength, which has so often failed us!—when the ineffable consolations of the Divine Comforter are offered us, to rely on the world, which has so often proved vain and deceitful! To him who sincerely implores his succour, the Holy Ghost will prove a spirit of counsel in difficulty, of strength in temptation, of light in darkness, of courage and zeal under every difficulty. The soul that ardently desires to partake of his consolations, the Holy Ghost will visit with that peace of mind which passeth all understanding, which the world cannot give nor take away.

Christians, let us then, in our warfare with our spiritual foes, arm ourselves with the invincible power of the Spirit of God. Let us, in all our sorrows and trials, flee for consolation to the blessed Comforter, the Fountain of living waters, disregarding the vain and disappointing comforts of the world. Let us not impiously distrust the grace and mercy of our divine Guide and Comforter, and, when an almighty arm is stretched out to defend us, rely on the arm of flesh. “Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God.”

Christian brethren, how great is the honour to which we are called, that we should be the subjects of the grace of God, the temple in which his Spirit dwells! What purity and circumspection, what zeal and holiness should distinguish and elevate us! Shall we defile the temple of God? “If any man defile the temple of God,” saith the apostle,

“him will God destroy.” In our natural estate, blind and erring, ignorant of the will of God, averse to his authority and laws, in bondage to sin and misery, with what gratitude should we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, designed to restore us from this miserable state, and to exalt us into the light of divine truth, into the holiness and the happiness of heaven! With what humble and grateful zeal and diligence should we submit to his inspection, follow his guidance, and seek his gracious influences in the worship and ordinances of his church, and especially in that supper, in which we this day commemorate his advent! If we resist, and grieve, and do despite to him, what plea shall we urge, at the tribunal of final judgment, against our condemnation? Almighty aid was offered us, and we refused it. Infinite wisdom undertook to guide us: we chose rather the erring lights of our own reason. Divine grace was seeking admission into our souls, to renew and purify them: we chose to remain in slavery to sin; we resisted God’s grace, we did despite to his Spirit, we counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith we were sanctified, an unholy thing.

Spirit of God! save us from this consummation of impiety and guilt—blasphemy against thee—contempt of thy succours, rejection of thy grace.

SERMON XXXIII.

THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT.

ROMANS viii. 16, 17.

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God : and if children, then heirs : heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.

THIS passage exhibits a most interesting view of the exalted condition of Christians. They are "*children of God*," enjoying the intimate favour of that glorious Being who is possessed of every perfection, and in whose favour substantial and everlasting felicity is to be found. They are "*heirs of God*," entitled to that inheritance of glory which God from the fulness of his bliss hath prepared for them. They are "*joint-heirs with Christ*;" associated with him in a title to that glory to which, as the Son of God, in his human nature he is exalted in heaven.

This passage also assures to them these blessings, not only by the testimony of their own hearts, but also by the witness of the Spirit of God. "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our Spirit, that we are the children of God : and if children, then heirs : heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ."

Christians ! let me at this time call you to contemplate your *privileges*, as described in the text ; and the nature of the *testimony* by which they are assured to you.

The *privileges* of Christians.

The testimony by which these privileges are assured to them.

I. The privileges of Christians.

1 They are "the children of God."

This interesting appellation implies the most tender affection, the most anxious care, not of some earthly parent, of goodness, wisdom, and power enlarged and exalted—but of that infinite and eternal Being whose goodness, wisdom, and power transcend all human conception. Animate as well as inanimate creation is the work of that Almighty Jehovah, who, in this sense, is the Father of the universe. All intellectual and moral beings acknowledge, as their Father, him, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named: all men are, in one sense, the sons of God, as they derive from him their life, their reason, their moral perception, their capacity for happiness,—and are destined by him for the enjoyment of his favour, for everlasting felicity in his presence. But sin has made them strangers to their Father's home—aliens from his family. By nature, they are children of wrath; that is, without any covenant title to his favour; and, on account of the actual transgressions which they commit, subject to his eternal displeasure.

But, thanks to the goodness and mercy of their heavenly Father, they are not left destitute of the means of return to his family and home, and of regaining his love and favour. On the conditions of truly repenting of their sins, of exercising lively faith in the merits of him whom God hath set forth as the Saviour of the world, and of steadfastly purposing to lead a new life, all who are admitted by

baptism into that spiritual family which is chosen out of the world, become again “children of God.” God, as their Father, promises to them forgiveness, to purify their hearts by his Holy Spirit, and to give them the spirit of adoption. Fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, they are born, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which abideth for ever. And if, as his children, they render to God the constant homage and affection of their hearts, and serve him with filial reverence and fear, he will continue to extend to them his fatherly protection and love.

2. Not only are Christians *children* of God—they are also *heirs* of God.

“If children,” is the inference of the apostle, “then heirs, heirs of God.”

Of little value indeed would be the privileges of “children of God” which Christians enjoy, if he had not in reserve for them, blessings beyond this frail and transitory life. For the privileges of children in this their state of exile, they only imperfectly enjoy their home: their heavenly Father’s house is in heaven; and, distant from it, they here only in a small degree partake of that favour which, in heaven, God their Father will, in its rich fulness, bestow upon them. They here only imperfectly partake of that divine image, as God’s children, which in heaven will be fully impressed upon their souls. And here, clothed as they are with an earthly tabernacle, they must wait in earnest desire to be clothed upon with a house which is from heaven.

Christians, then, are heirs of God. He hath prepared for them blessings, of which, in the pre-

sent life, they only imperfectly partake. An *inheritance* is reserved for them, incorruptible, and that fadeth not away—the inheritance of the saints in light. A *kingdom* is established for them, which cannot be moved. A *city* is preparing for them, which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. So certain is their final possession of these blessings, provided they do not, by disobedience, forfeit their Father's love, that the apostle speaks of Christians as already "sitting in heavenly places in Christ Jesus;" as already "come unto Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem;" as having already joined "the innumerable company of angels, and the spirits of the just made perfect;" as already beholding, in the unclouded radiance of heaven, "God, the Judge of all, and Jesus, the Mediator of the covenant."

3. Christians are "joint-heirs with Christ."

Immortal life and felicity are blessings which no creature can *merit*, or which he can exact from his Almighty Creator as due to his obedience, however perfect; much less are they blessings to which man, as a sinner, can lay claim. They are the free gift of God, through his Son Jesus Christ. Him hath God exalted to be "head over all things to his church," his redeemed people—the Author to all who believe in him, of spiritual life and felicity. Of that kingdom of glory which is to subsist for ever in the power and in the felicity of the Godhead, Jesus Christ, in his capacity as Mediator, is the head; and they who, through the strength and protection of this their divine Leader, overcome in that spiritual contest to which they are called with the world, the flesh, and the great adversary, are

finally to be admitted to share with him the felicity and glory of this his kingdom—in the figurative language of Scripture, to sit with him on his throne. He, their divine head and Saviour, hath, by the merit of his sufferings and death, purchased for them that heavenly inheritance, to which, infinitely exalted as it is above their deserts, no services of their own could possibly entitle them. He hath gone, in that glorified human nature which he assumed in order to become their Redeemer, to take possession of this inheritance of glory. By his resurrection from the dead he became “the first-born among many brethren,” giving to “as many as received him, power to become the sons of God,” and finally exalting them to be “joint-heirs with himself of everlasting glory.”

In this your title then, Christians, of “joint-heirs with Christ,” you are called to realize the important truths, that your salvation, unattainable by human efforts, is the work of him to whom, as your Redeemer, all power is given in heaven and on earth; and that with him, the first-born from the dead, and first entering on the possession purchased by his meritorious cross and passion, you are finally to share the felicity of that everlasting life which is the free gift of God through Jesus Christ.

Christians, then, are “*children of God, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.*” They enjoy the favour of God, their heavenly Father; they are destined for the enjoyment of the felicity of his presence; they are to share with their highly exalted Saviour in the glories of that heavenly kingdom, of which he is the head and ruler.

Highly interesting to us must be the testimony which assures these privileges to us.

II. The testimony by which the privileges of Christians are assured to them.

1. "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit." The exalted privileges of Christians are assured to them by the twofold witness of the Spirit and of their own hearts. It is not the Spirit alone witnessing *to* our hearts—he witnesses *with* them. The witness then is distinct—that of our own hearts, and that of the Spirit of God.

"If our heart condemn us not," saith the apostle John, "then have we confidence towards God." And the apostle Paul speaks in the person of sincere Christians—"Our rejoicing is this, the *testimony of our conscience*, that in simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world." When then our hearts do not condemn us of habitual and wilful violations of the laws of God; when they do not accuse us of neglect of his holy word, worship, and ordinances—when, on the contrary, they bear testimony to the sincerity, the fervency, and the constancy of our desires to serve him; when unfeigned sorrow for all our transgressions, lively faith in the merits of Jesus, the Redeemer of the world, love to God, and love to man, are the emotions and principles that regulate our affections and our conduct; when thus conscience, that faithful witness, arrays against us no wilful sin for which we have not deeply repented, no infirmity against which we have not sedulously guarded, and which we have not humbly confessed; when it is her testimony that the graces and virtues of the Christian character have animated our hearts and

shone forth in our lives, and that, rich in good works, and walking in the commandments and ordinances of God, we have adorned the doctrine of God our Saviour—then we have the witness of our own spirit that we are “children of God, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.” But,

2. These exalted privileges are also assured to Christians by the witness, external and internal, public and private, of the Holy Spirit of God.

The external and public witness of the Spirit consists in those miraculous gifts whereby the truth of the Gospel, and of all its promises, was fully established. This Gospel proclaims to all those who, humbly renouncing their sins, steadfastly believe in Jesus Christ, and obey him as their Lord and Master, a title to pardon, to the favour of God, and to the glory and bliss of heaven.

When, therefore, the first believers heard the simple and illiterate apostles of Jesus of Nazareth “speaking with divers tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance,” and, enlightened by this Spirit, declare “the words of wisdom and knowledge;” when they beheld these weak and despised men endued with the power of the Holy Ghost, open the eyes of the blind, unstop the ears of the deaf, unloose the tongue of the dumb, restore the withered arm and the diseased limb; and, still more glorious triumph, enter the domains of the grave and raise the dead—when they beheld all these signs, and wonders, and mighty works wrought by the power of that Spirit which Jesus sent on his disciples, then did they enjoy the witness of the Spirit, that the Gospel of Christ was indeed the power of God unto salvation, that all its promises were faithful and true, and that as many as re-

ceived it were "children of God, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ."

And, my brethren, when the faithful record of these things is open before us—a record written in the blood of its authors, and, with every possible mark of credibility, handed down as the sacred testimony of eye-witnesses; when the miraculous propagation of Christianity, and the constant fulfilment of prophecies, add their powerful testimony to the work of the Spirit in the first ages of Christianity, then do *we*, Christians of these last days, enjoy the witness of the Spirit, that, while faithful to him who hath quickened us from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, we are "children of God, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ."

But there is the *internal* and *private* witness of the Spirit assuring to Christians the same exalted privileges.

And this witness consists in his renovating and sanctifying power on the soul.

The great object of the reasoning of the apostle in the verses preceding the text, is to show that holy affections and a holy life are the evidence of being led by the Spirit. They who are under the power of the Spirit, he says, "walk not after the flesh:" they mind the things of the Spirit; they mortify the deeds of the body; and thus the Spirit witnesseth with their spirit that they are the sons of God.

The renovating and sanctifying power of divine grace, producing in us all holy affections and virtues, is the internal witness of the Spirit.

In the incomprehensible agency assigned in Scripture to the three Persons of the Godhead in the work of man's redemption, the Holy Ghost is

represented as the Author of our spiritual life. All the virtues which animate and adorn our hearts, all the good works which shine forth in our lives, are attributed to his invisible but powerful operations, quickening us from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, working together with us—in the appropriate language of our church, “going before us, that we may have a good will; and working with us, when we have that good will;” and by his instruction we think the things that are good, and by his merciful guiding perform the same; and in all things it is he who directs and rules our hearts. The holy graces and virtues, then, which animate and rule our souls, are the evidences that he dwells in us by his sanctifying power; and by them he witnesses that we are translated from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

You behold, then, professing Christians, the standard by which you may test your title to the glorious privileges of your Christian calling.

The descent of the Holy Ghost upon the apostles, and the miraculous works which, through his power, they performed; the establishment of the Gospel in the world by their supernatural labours, and the constant fulfilment of those prophecies which the Holy Ghost indited—these are general evidences to Christians, they are the general witness of the Spirit that those who have received, by a lively and obedient faith, that Saviour whom this Gospel sets forth, are “children of God, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.”

But the evidence to each Christian that he is entitled to these privileges, must be sought in the sanctifying operations of the Spirit on his own

soul. He has been regenerated in baptism, born again into a new state, a state of salvation, and made, on the conditions of repentance and faith, a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven. For the apostle says, "Ye are saved by the washing of regeneration; and by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body," and thus enjoy a title to the privileges of this body. But these privileges of his baptismal regeneration, conditionally conferred, will be forfeited, unless his baptismal vows, which pledged him to die to sin and to rise again unto righteousness, be fulfilled—unless, in the language of the apostle, he be the subject of the renewing of the Holy Ghost, be transformed by the renewing of his mind. In our regeneration, we are called into a state of salvation, a state in which the forgiveness of our sins, and all the blessings of salvation, are conferred on us, on certain conditions. Our renovation consists in the fulfilment of these conditions; by being born of God; by mortifying our sinful passions—in the figurative language of Scripture, by putting off the old man, and, in the same figurative language, by putting on the new man, created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works. If then, through the power of divine grace, pledged to us as the members of Christ's mystical body the *church*, and conveyed to us through its ministry and ordinances, we are quickened from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness, and crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts; abound in all the fruits of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance; and live righteously, soberly, and godly in the world; then we may be assured that we enjoy the witness of

the Spirit of God, and of our own spirit, that we are the children of God.

Try yourselves then, professing Christians, by this standard, and by this standard alone. All expectation of some special and distinct revelation of the Spirit to the mind, apart from his sanctifying influence upon them, is wholly unauthorized. It is as dangerous as it is unauthorized. The impulses of the imagination, of animal sensibilities, and of heated passions, may be mistaken for the impulses of the Spirit of God; and the spirit of delusion, instead of the Spirit of truth, may obtain dominion over you, and lead you to false hopes, and to dangerous security. But ascertain that your hearts are the subjects of his holy influence, so that, in the forcible and scriptural language of our church in her baptismal offices, "all sinful affections die in you, and all things belonging to the Spirit live and grow in you; and that, through him, you are endued with heavenly virtues, and are daily proceeding in all virtue and godliness of living;" and you may be assured that you have the Holy Spirit witnessing with your spirit that you are children of God.

Commence without delay, then, this important scrutiny. By the power of the Holy Ghost, in signs, and wonders, and mighty works, God hath assured to you a revelation of his will, the exceeding great and precious promises of his Gospel. By the gracious covenant, of which your baptism was the seal, he conveyed to you a title to these promises. You were made children and heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, of immortal glory. If seduced, by the false but alluring objects by which the world tempts you, to forget your high

vocation, you despise or neglect these privileges, and fail to secure them; and, instead of exercising repentance and faith, mortifying the deeds of the body, and living to the service of God, you live only to the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof—you will incur the tremendous guilt of contemning the counsel of God for your salvation; instead of continuing the children and heirs of God, you will make yourselves the children and heirs of him whose works ye do; and, instead of being joint-heirs with Christ of immortal glory, you will be (the sentence will be just, the condemnation unavoidable) heirs, with the devil and his angels, of everlasting wo.

But if, fulfilling the conditions of the Gospel-covenant, dead to sin and living unto righteousness, born of God, so that you are new creatures in Christ Jesus, you can indulge the humble hope that you are entitled to the witness of the Spirit testifying with your own hearts that you are entitled to the privileges of your Christian calling, transcendently exalted and happy is your condition. God is your reconciled God and Father; and the affection of the most ardent earthly parent is not to be compared with the love which your heavenly Father exercises towards you. The watchfulness and solicitude of the most affectionate earthly parent for the child of his hopes, afford but a faint idea of the watchful solicitude with which your heavenly Father regards you, his children in Jesus Christ. The pleasures and glory of the world are not worthy of a comparison with those transcendent blessings to which you are heirs. You are joint-heirs with the Son of God, and he hath gone before to take possession of the promised inheritance;

and you shall share with him a kingdom that shall never be moved, a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

What love and gratitude to your God and Saviour, and what holy superiority to the corrupting pleasures of the world—what inflexible resistance to its temptations—what patience and consolation under its adversities—what joy and triumph amid all the varied scenes of life, should these most exalted privileges inspire in your souls! They were conditionally conferred in your baptism; secure them by the constant exercise of that holy faith which purifieth the heart, which leads you to keep all the commandments and ordinances of God. Take heed lest, seduced by the temptations of the world, you fall short of the promised glory. Guided and defended by the Spirit of God, persevere unto the end. Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. The Lord of hosts is with you. In the time of trouble he will be your refuge, in the hour of temptation your strength; even through the valley of the shadow of death he will be with you; and you shall finally reach your Father's home. In the glories of his presence you shall enjoy your inheritance with your Saviour, who hath gone before to prepare it for you—a happiness exalted as the highest heavens, and lasting as the ages of eternity.

SERMON XXXIV.

THE CHRISTIAN'S VIEW DIRECTED TO UNSEEN THINGS.

2 CORINTHIANS IV. 18.

While we look not at the things which are seen.

Is this possible, my brethren? Surrounded by objects attractive to every sense and gratifying to every feeling, can we so far abstract ourselves from them as, in the literal meaning of the expression, not to look at them, not to regard them? No, constituted as we are, the things which are seen being not only the sources of high enjoyment, but essential to our comfort, and even to our present existence, must unavoidably engage our attention, our solicitude, and our exertions.

And yet this precept has a meaning not to be evaded. It is indeed only one of a numerous class of precepts which inculcate the same sentiment. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth," "Ye cannot serve God and mammon," were the declarations of the divine Author of our religion. And his inspired apostles enjoin us—"Love not the world, nor the things of the world." "The friendship of the world is enmity with God." "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." "Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth." "Seek those things which are above." "Look not at the things which are seen."

In what sense, then, we are to understand these injunctions, is a practical inquiry of the first importance, the determination of which will enable us to test our own claim to the character of real Christians, and of course our title to the favour of God and the happiness of heaven.

Let us regard, then, the Christian as looking not at the things which are seen, in reference to

His principles,

His duties,

His trials,

His enjoyments.

1. The principles by which the Christian is animated are not derived from the world, and render him independent of it.

The supreme principle which animates him, is a concern for his salvation. He very justly reasons—"What will it profit me, if I should gain the whole world and lose my own soul? The period of my existence here is short—but a few years, and those worldly prospects that now dazzle and allure will vanish in the darkness of the grave. What folly then, and what guilt and danger, to pursue the objects of the world, which I must leave—leave at a moment, perhaps, when I most confidently calculate on a long enjoyment of them—and neglect a provision for my soul, whose existence is prolonged beyond this transitory life, in a state of happiness or misery that never terminates!"

Influenced by these considerations, the Christian makes the salvation of his soul his supreme concern; no worldly objects are permitted to come in competition with it; they are all rendered subservient to the momentous work of avoiding that eter-

erty of misery, and of securing that eternity of happiness which succeeds the present transitory existence.

How different, in this respect, is the Christian from the man of the world ! The former regards the numerous objects and pursuits that in the world solicit and engage him, as in no respect worthy of desire or pursuit, except as they are subordinate to the higher concerns of that immortal existence for which he is destined, and as they aid him in attaining that eternal felicity which is there proffered him. No object which the world can present—its wealth, however abundant ; its honours, however splendid ; its pleasures, however fascinating—appears to him worthy of consideration, when put into the balance against the interests of eternity. But wealth, and honour, and pleasure are the objects that engross him who lives only for the world. His thoughts, his feelings, his time, his exertions are all devoted to his aggrandizement, his elevation, his enjoyment here. The things of eternity are forgotten—or, if they obtrude upon his thoughts, he banishes these unwelcome visitants in the renewed and vigorous pursuit of some of the objects of that world for which alone he lives, and which alone constitutes the source of his enjoyment. He lives for the world ; and when he is summoned to leave it, he enters on eternity unprepared ; he appears before the tribunal of his Maker loaded with his transgressions ; his soul is the seat of passions that render him unfit for heaven ; and the sentence that dooms him to misery, in banishment from the presence of his God, is unavoidable as well as just.

The Christian, on the contrary, having lived

above the world, by making all its concerns and enjoyments subservient to the salvation of his soul, finds the period of his departure from it the commencement of a state of felicity as pure in its nature as it is endless in its duration.

Another principle, under the influence of which the Christian lives above the world, is a supreme regard to the authority of God.

He constantly recognises the right of his Maker, Preserver, and Benefactor to his supreme homage and service. By the laws which his Almighty Sovereign imposes, and not by the maxims and the rules of an erring and corrupt world, does he regulate his conduct. What does the law of that Being prescribe, on whom, as my Creator and Sovereign, I am dependent, and to whom, as my Judge, I must render an account? What will he approve? what will he condemn? These are the inquiries which occupy him, and by which he tests the propriety of every measure, and ascertains the course to be pursued in every emergency. When the laws which the world imposes, the maxims which it prescribes, the course of conduct which it sanctions, are at variance with the supreme devotion and service which are due to the Maker and Sovereign of the universe, the Christian with decision and with promptness disregards and rejects them. His is a higher principle of action than any which the world can furnish; not, like worldly principles, liable to error and to change, and often corrupt in their tendency and consequences; but a regard to the authority of the supreme Lord of all, pure, correct, and unchangeable as his own infinite and eternal nature.

But the principle which especially animates the

Christian, and under the influence of which he lives above the world, is the principle of faith.

Destitute of this principle, the things of the world, which are ever presenting such numerous attractions, would engross his attention. It is faith only which diverts his view from the objects that solicit and gratify his senses, to those spiritual realities that afford substantial enjoyment to the soul. On the authority of the word of God, supported as it is by evidence conclusive to the understanding and sanctioned by the principles of nature, the Christian receives all those sublime truths that proclaim the perfections and the laws of the Maker and Ruler of the universe—the plan of redemption for sinful creatures, through the merits and grace of a divine Redeemer, and the glories of immortality for those whose destiny was the dust from whence they were taken. The Christian receives all the glorious truths which God has revealed, not merely with the cold assent of the understanding, but with the cordial affiance of the heart; so that these truths do not remain only the subjects of speculation, but are brought to control and to regulate every power of the mind, every feeling of the soul, and every action of the life. Emphatically, as the apostle describes him, he “lives by faith;” and thus perceiving, in the perfections of the adorable Author of his nature—in the wise and beneficent laws which the Benefactor of the universe has prescribed—in the gracious overtures of that plan of salvation by which, through the merits and grace of a divine Redeemer and a divine Sanctifier, pardon and holiness are assured to the corrupt and the guilty—in the favour and protection of him who is wise in counsel and mighty in power, as he

is good in all that he doth—and in the fulness of glory which, at the resurrection of the just, consummates the felicity of the righteous, both in body and soul—perceiving, in these divine and spiritual realities which by faith he contemplates, objects infinitely more worthy of his solicitude and pursuit than any of those which gratify only the senses, while too frequently they corrupt the heart, the Christian loves not the things of the world, which are seen; his enlightened vision, penetrating beyond the objects of time and sense, lays open to his enraptured contemplation the glories of the spiritual and eternal world; elevated above this abode of doubt, of error, of sin, and of sorrow, his spirit pursues its flight to the regions of light and glory, where it enjoys, in God's presence, a felicity which it sought in vain in the world. It is by the powerful and elevating principle of faith that the Christian looks not at the things which are seen: a citizen of heaven, heaven is his country, his home—though for a while he is an exile on the earth.

Thus, then, the Christian lives above the world, as it respects his principles.

2. Let us regard him as it respects his *duties*.

These are all discharged (even those which arise from his connexion with the world, and which will cease when that connexion is dissolved,) with fidelity, with a fidelity more uniform and pure than that with which the mere man of the world performs the same duties, because necessary to his comfort and advancement in the present life. They are often faithfully discharged by those who acknowledge and feel the influence of no higher

principles than such as arise from the dictates of nature, from worldly interest, from considerations of personal comfort and reputation, of domestic enjoyment, and of social order and prosperity. But the Christian advances further. In the discharge of every relative and social duty he disclaims not the influence of motives of a temporal nature; but he controls and regulates them all by the higher motives of a regard to the will of his Almighty Maker and Sovereign, and to the salvation of his soul. Under the paramount sway of these principles, his fidelity in the discharge of his worldly duties is secured, even when temporal motives cease to operate, or when indeed they have raised an opposing current. Acting at all times from those elevated motives which, arising from divine and spiritual things, are not subject to the changes and impurities from which no sublunary object is exempt, the Christian is uniform, prompt, vigorous, and decisive in the discharge of his duties, directing his view beyond every earthly interest, and every temporal consideration, to the tribunal of his Maker, where he is to be judged, and to the glories of eternity, that are to be his rewards.

3. But, in regard to the trials to which he may be called, the Christian most emphatically lives above the world.

He makes no pretensions indeed to that apathy which professes to be unmoved at calamities affecting those worldly interests and joys which are entwined around our hearts, and from which they cannot be sundered without pain. Still less does he boast of that indifference which beholds, in the loss of worldly comforts, the deprivation merely of

objects not essential to our real dignity or enjoyment, or to that philosophical composure which submits to the stroke solely from the consideration that it is inevitable and irremediable. No; the Christian feels as a man. Though far from regarding the good things of the present world as necessarily connected with his virtue or his peace, he values them as important means both of usefulness and enjoyment, and therefore, when lost, to be regretted; and as to the higher joys of relative and social affection, pure in their origin, benignant in their influence, could they be wrested from him without a pang, it would prove him to be not above, but below the finest feelings of nature. He knows also that it would be folly to fret at calamities not to be averted, but, on the contrary, aggravated by murmuring and repining. The Christian is composed and submissive; but his composure and submission do not subdue, but control that sensibility which gives animation to virtue and sprightliness to joy, and which, when chastened by Christian faith, turns even mourning into rejoicing. The Christian is composed and submissive, because his trust is firmly stayed on that Almighty Being who rules over all, in the whirlwind and the storm, as well as in the sunshine and the calm; and who, refreshing him here by his favour, is preparing for him hereafter the fulness of bliss.

Is he disappointed in some favourite expectation, from which he anticipated wealth or enjoyment? He acknowledges the superintending agency of that all-wise and all-merciful Being, who often disappoints our expectations, because the gratification of them would be injurious to our virtue,

and not promotive of our real happiness; and who hath promised, in that degree and at that period which infinite wisdom and goodness deem most fit, to those who seek his kingdom and the righteousness thereof, all things necessary to their temporal comfort.

Do adverse events, in rapid succession, overwhelm the edifice of the Christian's prosperity? Holding fast his confidence in God, the tempest agitates indeed, but does not prostrate his soul. In the midst of the wreck of his worldly goods, he can cast the look of composure and of trust to that Being who never yet afflicted but for the good of his creatures, never but in proportion to their deserts, and never without opening to the dejected spirit those consolations of his favour, those hopes of future bliss, which the world could neither give nor take away. The Christian, confiding in the promise that he will not be forsaken, is animated to those exertions that may be necessary to repair the ruin that has overwhelmed him. There is an unfailing promise—"Sorrow may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." Often the morn of joy succeeds, even here, the night of sorrow; but assuredly, a morn that no sorrow can cloud, the morn of an eternal day, will dawn, and bring the fulness of felicity to the soul of the Christian. Light is sown for the righteous, and joyful gladness for the upright in heart.

Do bereavements still more severe than the deprivation of worldly goods pierce with anguish the spirit of the Christian? Are his friends and his relatives, one by one, wrested from him; and is he left desolate on the bleak desert of the world? He rises above it, rises in holy faith to that celes-

tial region which is his home, the home to which his Christian relations and friends are translated before him, and where he will again meet them in the presence of God, never to experience the anguish of separation, or to suffer any diminution of the fulness of their bliss.

The Christian, animated by faith in God, lives above the trials of the world.

4. *Lastly*. Under the influence of the same holy principle, he lives above its enjoyments: not that he childishly disregards them—not that he proudly deems them unworthy of his attention—not that he pharisaically refrains from them, as necessarily incompatible with his virtue. Incompatible with virtue they often are, through excessive indulgence, or through the particular temperament of the individual, or the circumstances in which he may be placed. But to refrain from the good things of the world, when they do not abate the strength and fervour of our pious principles, or relax our virtuous efforts, would be an ungrateful contempt of the bounties of that gracious Being who hath conferred them upon us, that in the submissive, and thankful, and moderate enjoyment of them, we might glorify him, the beneficent Giver.

Still, the Christian, surrounded as he may be by worldly comforts and enjoyments, lives above them. He bears in mind that he is the heir of joys infinitely more exalted in their nature, and endless in their duration; not subject, as are his present joys, to the changes of time, to the imperfections of the world, to the stroke of calamity—but fixed in God's presence, and pure and exalted as the divine glory. In his progress to these joys,

the Christian thankfully and piously indulges in those which the bounty of a gracious Providence *here* bestows upon him; but the imperfect pleasures that solace his journey, only serve to increase his ardour for the full delights of his home; there his heart is surely fixed, where true joys are to be found; and anticipating there the consummation of the virtuous pleasures in which he here indulges, the enjoyment of them is not diminished by the fear of their termination. Oh! how truly are the ways of religion ways of pleasantness, and all her paths peace! The Christian loves not the world, and yet he only truly enjoys it.

If these things be so, how great is the mistake of those who regard a religious life as incompatible with their enjoyment! With a supreme devotion to the things of the world a religious life is indeed incompatible; for it is the characteristic of the Christian, that he looks not at the things which are seen. Animated by a supreme concern for the salvation of his soul, and regulated by an habitual regard to the authority of God, and by the powerful and elevating principle of faith, he discharges with fidelity all the duties of life; and while he derives consolation under its trials, looks beyond its highest pleasures to the incorruptible and unfading joys of his heavenly inheritance. Thus living above the world, he is consoled under its trials, and animated, in the experience of its virtuous pleasures, by the prospect of their consummation in the full glories of heaven.

Oh, then, Christians, look not at the things which are seen. By pious reading and meditation, and above all, by habitual prayer for the quickening and sanctifying inspirations of God's Holy Spirit, che-

rich that faith which is the principle of the spiritual life; daily, hourly, constantly realize that you are the servants of God and the heirs of heaven—the servants of God, bound in all things to please him, who will make all things work together for your good—and the heirs of heaven, not to be seduced, by the imperfect pleasures which surround you, from the incessant and supreme pursuits of those joys that are reserved for you in your heavenly inheritance. For this purpose, frequently participate of that holy supper, in which your spiritual privileges are effectually confirmed. When the world assails you by its trials, make Him your refuge and your friend, who, as a Father, loves and pities his children, loves and pities those who fear him; and be excited, by the experience of the vanity of earthly joys, to secure those which flow, pure and satisfying, from the city of the living God. And when the world surrounds you by its innocent enjoyments, indulge in them, but in moderation, remembering that you have a better and an enduring inheritance. Be constantly on your guard, that even the thankful and moderate enjoyment of the things which are seen, does not withdraw your attention from the heavenly objects which are not seen, but which are eternal—the only satisfying joys of the immortal spirit; in anticipation, its highest delight here—in possession, the fulness of its bliss hereafter.

SERMON XXXV.

THE NATURE AND IMPORTANCE OF SELF-DEVOTION TO GOD.

ROMANS xii. 1.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

THIS chapter is, with admirable propriety, recited by the church, in the epistles for the Sundays after the Epiphany: for having, on that festival, celebrated the manifestation of her Saviour to the Gentiles, as well as to those who before were God's chosen people, it is her design, on the succeeding Sundays, to enforce those holy graces and virtues which Christ in his Gospel enjoins; and with this view a chapter is selected which cannot be surpassed for a clear, and affecting, and impressive exhibition of Christian morals. I shall at present confine myself to the important and interesting verse which I have recited as my text, which will afford sufficient matter for a single discourse.

The first part of the Epistle to the Romans—that which precedes the chapter from which my text is taken—may be styled, from the nature of the subjects which it discusses, the speculative or argumentative part. The apostle answers the objections of the Jewish converts to the admission of the Gentiles to the privileges of the Christian

covenant, and shows the inefficacy of the observances of the Jewish law, considered as the meritorious ground of salvation. In a masterly strain of argument he proves, that as both Jews and Gentiles have "sinned, and come short of the glory of God," they can be "justified," not by the "deeds of the law," by which is the "knowledge" of sin, and not the pardon of it, and which pronounces the sentence, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die;" but only by that "redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God." He proves that, in the eternal purpose of God, both Jews and Gentiles are predestinated, not individually and absolutely to everlasting life, but generally and conditionally to the blessings of this covenant of mercy in the present life; there "being no difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich unto all who call upon him; and all that call upon him shall be saved."

Having thus unfolded the nature and the extent of the covenant of mercy in Jesus Christ, he proceeds, in the latter part of the epistle, to enforce those practical graces and virtues which constitute the perfection of our nature, and to which we are especially excited by the mercy of God in the redemption. To this latter part of the epistle, containing this admirable summary of evangelical duty, my text is the introduction; and it is an introduction worthy of the sublime exhortation which follows, in which the eloquent apostle exhibits a most perspicuous and interesting display of the whole circle of Christian virtues. "I beseech you there-

fore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

In order to open to you the full force and meaning of this important passage, I shall consider,

I The duty enjoined—"the presenting of our bodies a living sacrifice:"

II. The exalted characteristics of this sacrifice; that it is "a living sacrifice," "holy," "acceptable unto God," and our "reasonable service:" and,

III. *Lastly*. The motives to this duty, contained in the affecting address of the apostle: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God."

I am to explain,

I. The duty enjoined in the text—"the presenting of our bodies a living sacrifice unto God."

The comparisons are various under which the inspired writers represent to us the duties of the Christian life. Sometimes they are set forth under the similitude of a race, in which all our faculties are to be occupied in contending for the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus. Sometimes they are exhibited under the similitude of a combat, in which, in order to overcome the enemies who would wrest from us the crown of eternal life, we must "put on the whole armour of God, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit, the breastplate of righteousness; our feet being shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace." And in my text, Christian duty is displayed under the significant emblem of a "sacrifice." We are to present our "*bodies* a living sacrifice." Sacrifice being a material transaction, in order to preserve the consistency of the figure, the "body" is here put for

the whole man : we are to present our bodies—the meaning evidently is, we are to present *ourselves* “ a living sacrifice.”

It is thus the intention of the apostle to excite us to present ourselves—our whole persons, our souls as well as our bodies—a sacrifice unto God. And this duty implies,

1. That we devote ourselves supremely to God ;
2. That we thankfully acknowledge his gracious authority over us ;
3. That we renounce and mortify all the sinful passions of our nature ; and,
4. *Lastly*. That all these acts be performed in reliance on the merits and efficacy of that “ great sacrifice,” once offered for the sins of the world.

The presenting of ourselves a “ sacrifice unto God” implies,

1. That we devote ourselves supremely to him.

It would be foreign to the subject, for me to enter into any explanation of the origin or nature of the rite of sacrifice. Reason would never suggest the offering of an animal as a sacrifice for sin. The rite of sacrifice was instituted by God himself, as the means of propitiating his offended justice ; and it pointed significantly to that one great sacrifice, by which, in the inscrutable determination of the divine counsels, everlasting peace was to be effected between God and man. Of every species of sacrifice it was a characteristic, that the thing offered was separated from all common purposes, and solemnly devoted to God ; it became his property, and his alone. How important and extensive, then, the duty implied in the injunction to “ present ourselves a sacrifice unto God !” We are to surrender ourselves wholly to him, as our only Lord

and Master. We are to be separated from all pursuits and from all enjoyments that interfere with the supreme allegiance due to him. The world, and the things of the world, are never to be regarded when they come in competition with the sacred demands of his law. From this surrender of ourselves to the service of God, no faculty or affection of our souls is to be exempt; they must all be laid on the altar, as an offering to him whose sovereign, holy, just, and reasonable requisition it is—"Give me thy heart." Our understandings must be devoted to him; so that, (from the words of the church in one of her collects,) "by his inspiration, we may think those things that are good." Our wills and affections must be so controlled and directed, that (still to use the expressive language of the church) "we may love the things that God commandeth, and follow after that which he doth promise." All our appetites and propensities must be so reduced under the dominion of grace, that (still using the language of the liturgy) "our flesh being subdued to the Spirit, we may always obey the divine motions in righteousness and true holiness."

In fine, a supreme sense of our obligations to God must so animate and direct our whole conduct, that it may be said of us, in the emphatic language of the apostle, "whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, we do all to the glory of God;" that is, aiming at his favour and regulated by his law.

If this, brethren, is not our character and state, the duty enjoined by the apostle, of presenting ourselves a sacrifice to God, is yet to be performed.

2. This solemn devotion of ourselves as a sacrifice unto God, also implies a thankful acknowledgment of his power and goodness.

It was one of the important objects of sacrifice, to testify that the person who offered it, humbly and thankfully acknowledged the merciful and gracious dominion of the Creator of the universe. A lively sense of obligation, therefore, to the power and goodness of God, is a principal constituent of that spiritual sacrifice which we are directed to offer to him.

We are to present ourselves to God, as the creatures of his power, the children of his bounty, the subjects of his redeeming grace. We are humbly and thankfully to adore him as the Framer of our bodies and the Father of our spirits; the Author of all our mercies, and our reconciled Father and God in Christ Jesus. We are gratefully to acknowledge, that, for every enjoyment which we possess, and every hope which we cherish, we depend upon him, the Giver of all good; and we are to resolve to glorify this our Almighty Benefactor and Father with our bodies and our spirits, that are his. Thus shall we fulfil the high import of the injunction of the apostle, to "present ourselves a sacrifice to God."

3. In this duty is also implied the renunciation of our sinful passions.

In some of the sacrifices of the Jewish law, "the ofials of the beasts slain were burnt without the camp;" they were not suffered to degrade and defile the hallowed offering made to God. This circumstance teaches us, that in presenting ourselves a sacrifice to God, we are to separate from the offering every unholy passion. The Being to whom

we devote ourselves is infinitely holy, and he cannot look on sin but with abhorrence. If the offering we make of ourselves be polluted by inordinate and unholy passions, it will be an abomination unto him; and his language to us will be, what it was to the sensual and corrupt Jews of old—"Bring no more vain oblations." The Being to whom we devote ourselves, infinitely good in himself, delighteth in doing good to all his creatures; and the devotion of our most pure and ardent affections to his service, will be but a feeble tribute to him who gives us richly all things to enjoy—in whom we live, and move, and have our being—who is, in Christ Jesus, reconciling us unto himself, and making us heirs of everlasting life.

4. *Lastly.* All these acts must be performed in reliance on the merits and efficacy of that "great sacrifice," once offered for the sins of the world.

"Jesus Christ, by the offering of himself, once offered, hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." He was that "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," from whom every other sacrifice derived all its significance and value, and without the divine efficacy of which it would have been impossible that "the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin."

Through the merits of this great sacrifice, then, will the offering which we make of ourselves be rendered acceptable to God. Our best actions, our most exalted virtues, will not stand the scrutiny of his justice and holiness. Universal and entire as is the surrender of ourselves to God which the Christian sacrifice exacts, exalted and difficult as are the duties implied in it, it is only

through Christ, who strengtheneth us, that we shall be able thus to present ourselves to God.

This sacrifice, then, considered in itself, would be unavailing—and rested on as a ground of merit, would be highly insulting to the majesty of our Almighty Sovereign. But, presented in the name, and urged by the intercession of our divine Redeemer and gracious High Priest, it will be a “holy sacrifice, and acceptable to God.”

The nature of the Christian sacrifice being thus explained, I am led to the second division of my discourse, in which I am to lay before you,

II. The exalted characteristics of this sacrifice : it is a “*living*” sacrifice—it is *holy*—it is *acceptable unto God*—and it is a reasonable service.

It is a living sacrifice.

The sacrifices of the Jewish law required the *death* of the victim. But the Gospel sacrifice promotes the purity, the strength, the everlasting life of our natures : all its exactions advance our best and eternal interests. The Christian, presenting himself a sacrifice unto God, engages to glorify his Lord and Master by the most lively homage of his heart, by the most active and devoted obedience of his life. Employing, while he sojourns in this state of probation, all his powers, all his affections, all his exertions, in the service of his Almighty Maker, in the discharge of those pious, relative, and social duties, which his Sovereign and Judge, to whom he is to render an account, prescribes ; and offering, when he is advanced to the sacred courts of the church triumphant, the everlasting tribute of praise ; the Christian *lives*, in time and in eternity, to his God. His sacrifice is a “*living*” sacrifice.

It is also a "holy" sacrifice.

Unlike the sacrifices of the law, which derived all their sanctity from their divine institution, the Christian sacrifice is holy in its nature, in its effects, and in the means by which it is performed. It is a solemn and entire renunciation of the baneful dominion of sin; it engages us to the practice of every virtue; and thus leads us to become holy, as the God to whom we devote ourselves is holy: and this sacrifice is commenced and completed in the strength of that Divine Spirit who is the everlasting fountain of holiness.

This sacrifice is also *acceptable unto God*.

It is acceptable to God, because it leads us to renounce those evil passions and pursuits which insult his authority, condemn his justice, defy his power, and abuse his mercy; and because it excites us to cultivate those graces and virtues that conform us to his image, and that testify that we are deeply affected with a sense of the infinite obligations that bind us to him. When, through faith in the merits of his eternal Son, and relying on the efficacious aids of his grace, assured and pledged to us by the ministry and in the ordinances of his church, we present unto God the homage of pure and upright hearts, and the grateful obedience of our lives, we offer unto him a sacrifice more acceptable than all the costly oblations that were poured forth on the altar of the Jewish sanctuary. We have no longer cause to inquire, in the language of doubt and anxiety, "Wherewithal shall we come before the Lord, and bow ourselves before the most high God? Shall we come before him with burnt-offerings, and calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or ten thou-

sands of rivers of oil? Shall we give our first-born for our transgression, the fruit of the body for the sin of the soul? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

And it is a further commendation of this sacrifice that it is a reasonable service.

It is indeed with great propriety styled a *service*; it is claimed by our almighty Creator, our bountiful Benefactor, our merciful Redeemer, our most compassionate Father and Friend. Every principle of our nature, every rule of justice, every feeling of gratitude impels us to serve him, who, as the greatest and best of Beings, receives the homage of all the works that he has made. It is therefore not only a service, but a *reasonable* service. The duties which it enjoins are all of high and obvious obligation; they all tend to promote the peace and the perfection of our natures. Piety to God, justice and charity to man, temperance and purity in the government of ourselves—these are duties which, in all their various and important exercises, reason cordially and fully approves; they are the law of our being, a transcript of that eternal law which constitutes the harmony of the universe, and in which all intelligent creatures find their glory and their happiness. The Christian, therefore, in solemnly devoting himself to the practice of these exalted duties, in renouncing the tyranny of sinful passion, so destructive to his peace, so degrading and corrupting, engages in a reasonable service.

I have thus exhibited to you the *nature* of the Christian sacrifice, and its exalted *characteristics*.

It embraces the supreme devotion of all our

powers and affections to the service of our Almighty Lord and Sovereign. It enjoins us thankfully to adore that infinite power and goodness which sustain and comfort us, and to renounce those sensual passions which are not more offensive to the divine purity than degrading to ourselves. It teaches us to rely, for the acceptance of this supreme and holy oblation of ourselves, on the merits and grace of him through whom alone guilty creatures have access to the throne of offended justice. This sacrifice, therefore, comprehends the whole of that religious service which the law of God enjoins, and which reason dictates and approves. The active and animated service which this *living* sacrifice requires, will constitute our everlasting employment and happiness; purifying our nature, and conforming us to the holy image of God, it is the most acceptable service which we can render to him—a service not more enjoined by reason than agreeable to every good principle of our nature.

Recommended, then, as this sacrifice is by its exalted qualities, we behold in them motives sufficiently strong to lead us to present ourselves a sacrifice to God.

But this duty is urged by other considerations, that make the most powerful appeal to every generous and amiable feeling.

III. For “the mercies of God” are the motives which the apostle urges, in my text, as the most constraining and powerful principles of Christian duty.

He does not display the awful majesty and power of Jehovah, which demand the reverence of his creatures; he does not make bare that arm of

justice which will not spare the transgressor ; the holy apostle does not assume the severe tone of command, or the more appalling language of denunciation ; he exhibits the mercies of God as the motive to present ourselves a sacrifice to him, and he therefore uses the mild language of persuasion, as more congenial with the theme on which he intends to dwell.

“ I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God.”

By the mercies of God, your *Creator*, who raised, from an inert and shapeless mass, those bodies which now erect look towards heaven, and breathed into them the breath of life ; who endowed your souls with those spiritual and immortal powers which distinguish you from the brutes that perish, and which constitute your perfection, dignity, and happiness—by the mercies of him in whom you live, and move, and have your being, I beseech you, present yourselves a *living* sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto him.

By the mercies of God, your *Benefactor and Preserver*, who continually sustains you, who protects you in danger, succours you in misfortune, and crowns you with the rich blessings of life—by the mercies of him who giveth you richly all things to enjoy, I beseech you, present yourselves a sacrifice unto him.

By the mercies of God, your *Redeemer*, who hath revealed to you, in the Gospel of his Son, his eternal Being and perfections, every truth connected with your duty and your happiness ; who spared when we deserved punishment, and in his wrath remembered mercy ; who, in your lost estate, laid help on one that is mighty, and by his eternal Son wrought your deliverance from condemnation and

death—by the mercies of him who is the sure and everlasting refuge of the penitent, the Author of life and glory to all who believe in him, I *beseech* you, present yourselves a sacrifice to him.

You are not called, brethren, to an unreasonable duty, to a severe and degrading service; for it is the honourable, the dignified service of him who is the source of goodness as well as of power, and who is infinitely exalted above the most perfect of the creatures he has made. The service of that beneficent God in whom is the fulness of felicity, must be productive of the highest pleasures which our nature can receive or enjoy: it confers here, a peace which passeth understanding—and it conducts us hereafter, to those immortal glories which eye hath not seen, which ear hath not heard, and of which the heart of man cannot conceive. If we neglect a service thus honourable and exalted, thus rich in present peace and in immortal felicity, and wilfully refuse to engage in it, though urged by the mercies of our Maker and Preserver, our Redeemer and God, what can we look for but that indignation which Jehovah hath denounced against his adversaries? Even that mercy which we have insulted and spurned will pour upon us the vials of wrath. And when mercy, that so long pleaded for our pardon, is roused to vengeance, who can stand?

The mercies, brethren, of God, our Creator, our Preserver, our everlasting Redeemer, now invite us. Bound to him by infinite obligations, as our “reasonable service,” to him let us devote ourselves “a living sacrifice.” Through thy grace. O God, may it be a “holy” sacrifice, and through thy mercy in Jesus Christ thy Son, an “acceptable” one unto thee.

SERMON XXXVI.

THE PATH OF THE JUST.

PROVERBS iv. 18.

The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

THOUGH feeble and faint the first dawn of light which glimmers through the midst of darkness and announces the approach of the glorious luminary of the heavens, it shineth more and more until it bursts forth in the full splendour of perfect day.

Behold, brethren, the comparison by which the text denotes the life of the just man. Faint and feeble the beginnings of his spiritual life; but it increases in strength and splendour, it shines more and more with the Christian graces, until, in the final state of bliss, every cloud which in this imperfect life shaded it being dispelled, it steadily sends forth the eternal lustre of celestial glory.

The life of the righteous should be progressive in goodness. Daily advancing in all holy virtues and graces, his love to his God, his trust in his Saviour, his pious and devout affections should constantly become more sincere and strong, and his active sympathy and benevolence should burn with a brighter and brighter flame. The great work of crucifying the flesh with its corrupt affections, and of overcoming the world, its sinful temptations and pleasures, should be unceasingly pur-

sued. Thus all the divine, social, and personal virtues would be displayed in his life and conversation, with increasing brightness. “The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.”

The service, then, to which Christians are called, is not an inactive service; it demands more than feeble, occasional, relaxed exertions; it is not satisfied with present attainments, nor does it permit us to be stationary in our course; enjoining persevering, increasing efforts, it calls continually for brighter displays of those pious, humble, holy, and benevolent virtues which shed around their possessor a resplendent and attractive lustre, and prepare him for shining with immortal glory in the courts of the celestial Zion.

The duty of advancing in the holy graces and virtues of the Christian service is demanded by *the nature of the service itself*; it is enforced by the *command of God*; it is urged by the dictates of *gratitude* and *interest*.

The duty of advancing in all the graces and virtues of the Christian life is demanded by the *nature of the service*.

This service consists in a constant warfare with all the sinful passions and temptations of our fallen nature; requiring the old man, which is corrupt after the flesh, to be put off, and the new man to be put on, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness. The flesh, with its affections and lusts, is to be crucified, and we are to be renewed in the spirit of our minds, and to be fruitful in every good work.

The Christian service setting before us this high standard, admits of no relaxation of effort. The

holiness at which we are to aim is so pure and exalted, that our advances to it must necessarily be gradual and progressive; and no man will be entirely freed from the dominion of sin, and completely established in purity and virtue, until the period when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and mortality be swallowed up of life.

Consider then, Christians, how numerous and exalted the graces which should adorn your character—how sincere and ardent should be your love and gratitude towards your God and Saviour—how profound your humility, your submission, and your penitence—how active your benevolence, how lively your sympathy and your compassion—how unaffected your meekness, your forbearance, your gentleness, and kindness—how inflexible your integrity, fidelity, and justice—how uniform and rigid your sobriety, your temperance, your government of your passions—how complete your superiority to the sinful and transitory pleasures of the world—how fervent your desires after the perfection and bliss of heaven!—consider these numerous virtues and graces, which you are not merely to possess, but in which you are to *excel*, and surely you will not pretend that you have already attained, and that you have no further advances to make in the Christian course. The view of the exalted nature of the Christian service, humbling all our aspiring pretensions, will impress on us the truth, that, however great our pious attainments, however bright our graces and virtues, they are still far below the standard at which we are required to aim, are still faint and feeble in their lustre, and that they must shine more and more unto the perfect day.

The duty of progressive religion, of advancing in all the attainments of the Christian service, thus demanded by the nature of the service itself, is enforced by the *command of God*.

He has fixed no human, no finite standard of virtue, at which we may rest, and boast, with confident presumption, that we have already attained. He commands us to “be perfect, as *he* himself is perfect;” to “be holy, as the Lord our *God* who hath called us is holy.” The perfection, then, at which he has enjoined us to aim, forbids all intermission of our efforts, and that confidence in our own attainments which cherishes indolence and inactivity. God, in calling us to aspire after his own infinite perfection, has plainly and forcibly impressed on us the necessity of increasing diligence and zeal, and of constant progress in holiness and virtue. The standard at which we are to aim being infinite, there can be no point, in our advances to it, at which we can stop. If we relax our efforts in the spiritual life—if we are contented with any present acquisitions, however exalted—if we do not forget the things which are behind, and counting nothing done while any thing remains to be done, press forward with holy zeal to higher attainments, to brighter and more exalted virtues—we shall violate the express injunctions of that Almighty Sovereign who has required of us continual advancement in holiness, not only to assimilate us to his own divine image, and to fit us for the enjoyment of his holy presence, but as the test of our fidelity, our sincerity and ardour in his service.

But the duty of advancing in the attainments and graces of the Christian life, thus enforced by

the command of God, is urged by the dictates of *gratitude*.

It is only by a holy life that we can glorify our Almighty Maker, the beneficent Benefactor who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; it is only by excelling in all the graces and virtues of the Christian life, that we can testify our gratitude to that Almighty Deliverer who paid, with his own blood, the price of our ransom from sin and death; and it is only by denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and living righteously, soberly, and godly in the world, that we can answer the end for which the eternal Son of the Father came into the world, which was to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify us unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

Your advancement in holiness and virtue is therefore, O Christians, the test of your gratitude to your God and Saviour. In proportion as you excel in all holy dispositions and virtues, will you evidence the sincerity and the ardour of that most noble and exalted of all virtues, gratitude to your Maker and Redeemer; and if you consider the many mercies that thus call for gratitude, you will feel the force of this consideration in animating your progress in the service of your God. For the gift of a rational and immortal nature, which, raising you far above the brute creation, assimilates you to the intelligences of heaven, and even to God himself, you are bound to praise him who made you after his own image. For the innumerable enjoyments of the present life, and for the brighter hopes of future bliss, you are called to praise him who delighteth in doing good to his creatures. Infinitely exalted are the spiritual mercies which he hath conferred

on us. His only-begotten and well-beloved Son he gave for our redemption; the light of his favour he sheds upon us; from death and hell he hath ransomed us; the transcendent glories of heaven he prepares for us. If we are ungrateful for these infinite and eternal mercies of our God, we must not talk of our gratitude, or boast of our sensibility. And how shall we display the grateful feelings of our hearts but by constant, zealous exertions in his service—by devoting ourselves, with unceasing ardour and fidelity, to his honour and glory? No attainments will be valued, no exertions counted great, when we consider how vast is our debt of gratitude to our Redeemer and God; we shall praise our heavenly Benefactor with *increasing* ardour, while we have our breath—we shall serve our gracious God and Saviour with *increasing* fidelity, while we have our being. Eternity, O our God, will take up the work of praising thee; and the services of eternity, augmenting in fervour and in strength, will be inadequate to the debt of love which we owe thee.

Our continual progress in holiness and virtue, the test of gratitude to our God and Saviour, is also enforced by the dictates of *interest*.

We cannot remain stationary in our course: if the dominion of divine grace in our hearts does not increase in strength and power, sin will be making insidious but successful inroads on our piety and virtue. Our active and ardent powers, (such is the constitution of the human mind,) will advance either in the paths of virtue, or in the career of sin and folly. As you value, therefore, your present attainments, as you fear relapsing into folly and sin, press forwards continually with more vigorous zeal

in the service of your God. Constant and earnest endeavours after more exalted holiness and virtue are your only security for the possession of your present acquirements, your only safeguard against the assaults of temptation and the insidious arts of that adversary who seeks for a moment of ease and security to make you his prey.

Our spiritual peace and joy will be in proportion to our advancement in the ways of religion. The more lively our love to our God, and the more faithfully we endeavour to serve him, the more shall we enjoy the refreshing comforts of his presence. The more ardent and sincere our gratitude to the Saviour, and the more faithfully we devote ourselves to him, the more consoling and triumphant will be our alliance on his merits. The more we love the law of God, the greater will be our peace: the more the dominion of sin is subdued in our hearts, the greater will be our happiness and joy. In proportion, Christians, to the brightness of your graces, the triumphs of your faith, and the sincerity of your obedience, will be your rejoicing in that God whose secret is with the righteous. As your path shines more and more unto the perfect day, the light of God's countenance will shine brighter upon you, until, in the courts of the celestial Zion, it encircles you with unspeakable glory. In that kingdom, where one star differeth from another star in glory, your rewards will be in proportion to your attainments in virtue, to the purity and strength of your Christian graces. Let this animating consideration rouse you to more vigorous zeal in the service of your God. What more powerful motives can possibly be presented to you? While the merits of your blessed Redeemer render your obedi-

ence acceptable to God, and his grace gives you strength for the highest attainments, you have the animating promise, that every advance which you make in holiness and virtue shall advance your glory and bliss hereafter. Here then direct every power of your souls; here then stir up within you a holy emulation. Blest indeed the lowest ranks in the kingdom of heaven—more blest the seats that are near the throne of the divine glory. Aspire after them, O Christians! The brighter the virtues of your warfare, the brighter the crown which will reward your victory. The brighter the path of duty which you traverse in this season of your probation, the brighter the blissful and eternal day which will succeed it.

With so many motives to urge you, labour then to advance continually in the graces and virtues of the Christian service, to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Your progress in the Christian life will depend on your exercise of devout *meditation*—on your attendance on the public *ordinances* of religion—on your cherishing in your minds the divine power of *faith*—and on *private prayer*.

Frequently *meditate* on the perfections of God, on the infinite mercy and grace of his eternal Son, on the excellence of the divine service, on the guilt and misery of sin, on the numerous and exalted rewards of piety and virtue. Frequently call to mind the uncertainty of life and the vanity of its joys, the certainty of death and the eternity which is to succeed it, the torments of hell, the glories of heaven. Thus frequently and seriously meditate on all the infinitely momentous truths of religion, and their importance will be more deeply impressed

on your minds, your hearts will be the more earnestly engaged in the pursuit of them, the world will have less sway over you; you will live more for eternity, more for God; every grace and virtue will be brightened; your path will shine more and more unto the perfect day.

Devoutly and regularly attend on all the institutions and ordinances of religion. They are the channels of divine mercy and grace. Bring to them humble and penitent hearts, and they will unite you to your God; they will quicken your zeal and ardour in his service; they will arm you against the temptations of the world; they will shed on your souls those divine joys which will animate you in the service of your God; they will advance you in all the graces and virtues of the Christian life, leading you from strength to strength, until at length you appear before the Lord of hosts in the heavenly Zion.

As the quickening principle of the spiritual life, labour to *cherish in your hearts the divine power of faith*. It is the inspired declaration—"The just shall live by faith." In proportion to the strength of this principle will be your sincerity, your zeal and ardour in the Christian life. For it is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen:" it brings to the mind, as if they were seen and present, spiritual and eternal truths. The more lively and strong your belief that God is your Sovereign and Judge, that Jesus Christ is your all-sufficient Intercessor and Redeemer, that the torments of hell or the glories of heaven await you beyond the present uncertain scene, the more will you disregard all sublunary objects when compared with the things of eternity,

and the more earnest and the more successful will be your progress in the great work of your salvation.

But ineffectual will be all your efforts, unless they are sanctified and quickened by frequent and *devout prayer*.

It is "prayer which opens heaven, and lets down" upon the soul that mercy which is its only solace, that grace which is its only safeguard. He who, by fervent prayer, lives, if I may so speak, in heaven, will display on earth a portion of its purity, and enjoy on earth a foretaste of its glories. Prayer is the soul of the new man in Christ Jesus. Destitute of this principle, he languishes and dies. "Pray without ceasing," says an inspired apostle; evidently directing us not only to stated exercises of devotion, but to that lively and grateful sense of the divine presence, that constant aspiration after the divine favour, those secret and frequent ejaculations of supplication and praise, in which consists the spirit of prayer. Pray *thus* without ceasing; exalted will be your Christian attainments, exalted your joys. When engaged in the busy scenes of life, lift up your souls to God, and you will disarm the world of its temptations and snares. When the blessings of nature and the bounties of Providence gladden your hearts, lift up those hearts to God; brighter will be the joy irradiating your bosoms. When sunk in the shades of adversity, direct the prayer of humble hope to him who is the Protector of those who trust in him, and holy serenity and hope shall beam upon your desponding spirits.

Finally, brethren, in your course to the heavenly Jerusalem, let prayer be your guide and inseparable

companion, and your path shall be as the shining light, shining more and more unto the perfect day.

The path of the just, refreshed by the lights of God's favour, thus terminates in everlasting glory. But the way of the wicked is darkness; bright and joyous as may be their prospects in this world, the path which they are pursuing leads to *death*, and will take hold on *hell*. Let them awake, ere they stumble on the dark mountains, and the things that belong to their peace be for ever hidden from their eyes.

SERMON XXXVII.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE TALENTS.

St. MATTHEW XXV. 14.

The kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.

THE parabolic mode of instruction pursued by our blessed Lord, is founded in nature. It is difficult to convey a forcible idea of intellectual and moral truths but by the aid of similitude; thus figuratively represented, they appear with greater clearness to the understanding, and more forcibly interest the imagination and the heart. The symbolical style, therefore, connected with the constitution of human nature, has prevailed among mankind in every age and country. It was, however, particularly prevalent in the Eastern nations, where the circumstances of climate, of the face of the country, and of the state of society, were highly favourable to the excitement and the indulgence of a strong and lively imagination.

In these considerations we shall find a cause for the figurative mode of instruction adopted by our Saviour. But he had other reasons for the employment of it. The symbolical style, though aiding our conception of religious and moral truths—in order to produce this effect, requiring some attention on the part of those to whom it is addressed

—was a trial of the docility of his hearers; whether “seeing, they would see, and hearing, they would hear, and would understand;” that is, whether they would exercise that honest and patient attention which was necessary to the full comprehension of the truths delivered, or would wilfully close their ears to the voice of instruction. The mission of our Saviour also was to a “disobedient and gainsaying people.” Their glaring errors were to be corrected; their gross vices were to be reformed. This was a business requiring the utmost delicacy and management, lest the provocation of resentment should lead to personal insult, or should wholly defeat the object of his reproof—the conviction of the offenders. It was therefore a dictate of prudence to soften the severity of his reproofs, by concealing them under the veil of similitude, or allegory.

For all these reasons we find our blessed Lord so often conveying his instructions in the form of parables.

My text is the commencement of a parable, in which our Saviour represents the dispensation of his spiritual blessings to mankind, the improvement which they make of them, and the awards which he will finally assign them, under the similitude of a man who, travelling into a far country, intrusts his servants with a particular proportion of his property; and on his return, requires from them an account of the improvement which they have made of their trust, and gives them their sentence according to their deserts.

In the verse preceding the text, our Saviour had delivered the caution—“Watch, for ye know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of man

cometh." He then enforces this caution by the parable of which my text is the commencement :—"The kingdom of heaven," or, omitting these words, which are not in the original—"He," that is, the Son of man, whose coming was spoken of in the preceding verse—"He is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants and delivered unto them his goods." Jesus Christ, the Lord of all things, head of all things to his church, has ascended into heaven; but thence, from the throne of dominion, he distributes his gifts and graces to his disciples on earth. "And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey." Jesus Christ, the Lord of his disciples, does not distribute to them equally his gifts and graces; according to their several ability, to their natural capacity of improving them, or to the stations of importance or difficulty in which they may be placed, does he proportion his spiritual favours.

The improvement which these servants made of the trust committed to them, is recorded in the ensuing verses :—"Then he that had received the five talents, went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one, went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money." The sincere disciples of Christ, mindful of their obligations to their Lord and Master, and of the account which they are to render to him, will zealously and faithfully improve the spiritual trust which they have received; while the negligent and slothful Christian, like the faithless servant in the parable, hides

his talent in the earth—neglects to improve the grace which he has received, to his own salvation and to the honour of his Master. But a day of account is coming. “After a long time, the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents, came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained besides them five talents more.” Happy the Christian who, like this faithful servant, can thus address his Saviour and Judge: ‘Lord, the five talents of grace thou hast given me, I have improved, and they are become five talents more!’ Happy the Christian who thus improves his spiritual privileges! for, like the faithful servant in the parable, “his Lord will say unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.” Nor will the improvement of inferior talents go without its reward. For “he also that had received two talents came, and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents besides them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.”

The unprofitable servant, who, instead of improving the talent committed to him, had hid it in the earth, now comes to render his account. “Then he which had received the one talent came, and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strewed; and I was afraid,

and went and hid thy talent in the earth : lo, there thou hast that is thine." Our indignation is roused at this insolent plea, by which this slothful servant excuses his shameful neglect to improve the trust committed to him. But his plea is that whereby professing Christians sometimes seek to extenuate or to defend their neglect of their Master's service, urging that it is unreasonable and severe. Mark the reprimand which the servant in the parable receives from his lord. "His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strewed ; thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury." 'Thou wicked and slothful servant, admitting thy representation of me as a hard master, reaping where I have not sowed, and gathering where I have not strewed, to be just, it should have led thee to be the more diligent in improving a trust, of which thou didst expect I would exact so severe an account. Thou shouldst have put my money to the exchangers, that, at my coming, I might have received mine own "with usury,"' with improvement, with lawful increase ; this being the idea annexed to the word "usury" in the sacred writings. And in like manner, thou, wicked and slothful Christian, who dost not improve the grace and spiritual privileges intrusted to thee by thy Lord, because thou dost consider him as a hard Master, thy very excuse proves thy folly as well as thy guilt. For if thy Lord and Saviour "reaps where he does not sow, and gathers where he has not strewed," if he rigorously exacts that to which he has no just claim, surely

thou mayest expect he will require from thee that to which he has a just claim—an improvement of the trust committed to thee, a return for the privileges he has conferred upon thee. The just sentence pronounced upon the faithless servant, will be pronounced upon thee. “Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents.” The spiritual blessings which we fail to improve, shall be taken from us, and given unto them who will improve these blessings to their own good, and to the honour and glory of their gracious Benefactor. “For unto every one that hath,” that improves the talents or the grace bestowed upon him, “shall be given,” more abundant grace shall be conferred; “but from him that hath not,” that fails to improve his spiritual privileges, “shall be taken away even that which he hath,” the blessings which he neglects shall be taken away. Alas! deplorable is the condition to which the unprofitable receivers of the grace of God are consigned! “And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Brethren, this parable concerns us all; the instructions which it contains are deeply important.

God gives grace sufficient to all men to enable them to serve him; this grace, however, is not given equally to all, but in different degrees, according to their respective capacities and circumstances.

He requires of all men an improvement of the grace given, in proportion to the measure which they have received.

The pretext for negligence in his service, that he exacts what men are unable to perform, is unfounded and unreasonable.

AN account must be rendered by all men to God, of the improvement which they have made of the talents and the grace given them.

God will finally assign to men various degrees of happiness or misery, according to their respective deserts.

These are the particulars which embrace all the instruction contained in the text, and on which I now proceed to remark.

1. God gives grace sufficient to all men to enable them to serve him; this grace, however, is not given equally to all, but in different degrees, according to their respective capacities and circumstances.

The Parent of all men, he wishes "all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth." Gracious and merciful to his offending creatures, he is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." But so dependent is human nature on God, the Sovereign of his creatures and the Author of every good and perfect gift; so great is the weakness and corruption of nature, that we are "not sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God." "It is God who worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure." If therefore he "will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth;" if he is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance;" he certainly does not withhold from them the grace which, if they diligently improve it, will "lead them into truth, and bring them to repentance. If grace sufficient to work out their salvation be not conferred upon all men, then God is a respecter of persons; then he

wishes all men to be saved, and yet withholds the grace necessary to enable them to work out their salvation; then he wishes all men to come to the knowledge of the truth, and yet confers not the grace which only can lead them to it; then he is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance, and yet he does not bestow on all that grace, without which repentance is impossible, and their destruction inevitable; then he is indeed “a hard Master, reaping where he has not sown, and gathering where he has not strewed,” exacting of all men to serve him under the awful sanctions of everlasting happiness or everlasting misery, and yet not conferring on all the grace without which it is impossible to serve him.—These conclusions, so contrary to Scripture, so abhorrent to every dictate of goodness and justice, and so dishonourable to God, the gracious Father of his creatures, will result from the denial of the truth, that God gives to all men grace sufficient to enable them to serve him. We reject, then, every doctrine that is contrary to this truth, every doctrine which would confine that grace which bringeth salvation to all men, to a portion of mankind who exclusively partake of this most precious gift of heaven. God is a righteous Master, who delivers to all his servants (and all men are the servants of this their gracious Master in heaven) his goods—his heavenly grace—that treasure intrusted to us as his stewards, and which “we are to occupy,” to improve, until he come and demand an account of our stewardship. “Of his fulness we have all received; and grace for grace; according to the measure of the gift of Christ.”

But though this grace be given in a *sufficient*, it

is not given in an *equal* degree to all men. The standard by which it is apportioned is, their ability to improve it. For thus, in the parable, the lord of the servants "gave unto one five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his *several ability*." There are various ranks of beings in the creation of God; and among these ranks there are various grades in their respective capacities. The unnumbered hosts of angelic spirits that surround the throne of the Eternal, are not equal in their perfections and power. There is the seraph, who worships near the throne; and there is the ministering spirit, who waits at humbler distance to do the pleasure of the great Creator. Man, though little lower than the angels, is still inferior to them; and among men there is the greatest variety in their natural powers. This distinction of rank and capacity among the intelligent creatures of God, serves to make manifest his works, "to show forth his wisdom, his power, and his glory." And that he thus gives to all severally as he pleaseth, is no infringement on his goodness or his justice, provided he gives to all a capacity for happiness, and the means of attaining it; and finally deals with them according to the improvement which they make of the trust reposed in them. Thus, to different men he assigns different capacities of serving him; and according to this standard does he dispense to them his grace, "to each man according to his *several ability*." But,

2. He requires of all men an improvement of the grace given, in proportion to the measure which they have received.

This is the second observation which I deduced from the parable.

God, in justice, can claim the improvement of the talents and the grace bestowed upon us; and this improvement is necessary to make these gifts conducive to his glory, to the good of others, and to our own salvation. As all our natural powers are derived from God, he may justly demand that we employ them in his service. The free gift of his grace in Christ Jesus he has bestowed upon us, and he may justly demand that this inestimable gift should not remain unimproved. We have all a work assigned us, for which the grace of God is superadded to our natural powers—the promotion of the glory of God, the happiness of others, and our own salvation. These are the important ends for which the Judge of all requires from us the improvement of our natural powers and advantages, and of his heavenly grace. But he does not demand the same improvement from all. From him that had received only two talents, he requires that two more be added to them; while he that had received five talents, is required to increase them to five talents more; and the merciful Judge of all would have accepted him that had received but the one talent, had he only added to it one talent more. Thus, then, our improvement is expected to be in proportion to the natural powers which we have received, to the advantages which we enjoy, and the measure of spiritual grace vouchsafed us. You will therefore perceive the truth of the third observation deducible from the parable, viz. that,

3. The pretext for negligence in the service of God, that he exacts what men are unable to perform, is unfounded and unreasonable.

The unprofitable servant in the parable excused his neglect to improve the talent committed to him, by the plea, "Lord, thou art a hard master, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strewed." Does the Christian hide his talent in the earth, and excuse his sloth and negligence by the same plea? It is a plea that will utterly fail him. God, willing that all men should be saved, has given to all men, through his mercy in Jesus Christ, the grace to serve him acceptably. He has eminently crowned us with his spiritual favours. He has given us the knowledge of that Saviour, through whose blood we may receive the remission of our sins. He has given us his holy word, to be a light unto our feet and a lamp unto our path. He instructs, he warns, he encourages, he comforts us by the ministry of that holy church into which we are called, and by which we are to be prepared for final happiness in his heavenly kingdom. Incorporated into this church by baptism, and ratifying our vows, we have received of the fulness of its divine Head that measure of grace suited to our abilities and our station, by which we are enabled to work out our salvation. And dost thou, O Christian! hide in the earth the precious talent thus intrusted to thee? Art thou unprofitable under all these means of grace? or, art thou worse than unprofitable—dost thou turn the grace of God into lasciviousness, and disregarding the spiritual blessings bestowed upon thee, continue in thy sins? And is it thy excuse for this sloth, this negligence, this obstinate continuance in sin, that thy Lord is "a hard Master, reaping where he has not sown, and gathering where he has not strewed?" Blush,

O Christian! at this unfounded plea; blush at thy ungrateful return to that gracious Master, who has distinguished thee with the means of grace, and with the hope of glory. Slothful and unprofitable Christian! tremble at thy guilt. For,

4. An account must be rendered by all men to God, of the improvement which they have made of the talents and the grace given them.

This was the fourth observation founded on the parable.

God hath not bestowed upon us high natural endowments and the inestimable treasures of his grace, and allowed us to neglect them. He requires us to improve them according to the measure which we have received. If we have received five talents, he requires us to add to them five talents more; if we have received two talents, he requires us to add to them two talents more; and even the one talent is to be returned to him with increase. Nor are these requisitions of which he will fail to require from us an account. "The Lord of these servants cometh and reckoneth with them." "God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness." Then we shall have to render him an account of the improvement which we have made of the talents bestowed upon us;—we shall have to render an account to him, who will come in the glory of his Father and his holy angels; before the brightness of whose presence the sun will be darkened, and the moon withdraw her light; before the greatness of whose majesty the heavens will depart, and the earth be removed; and before the terrors of whose justice the nations of the world shall quake, and devils in

the dominions of darkness tremble. We shall have to render an account to him who hath searched our hearts, who hath spied out all our ways; we shall have to render an account to him of all our thoughts, all our words, all our actions; and we shall have to render this account before the hosts of heaven, and before all mankind assembled with us to receive their doom.

Brethren, if we have hid our talent in the earth, if we are not prepared for his coming, have we not cause to tremble at the declaration—"The Lord of these servants cometh and reckoneth with them?" But if we have diligently improved the talents committed to us, we may then lift up our heads, for our redemption draweth nigh.

5. The Judge of all will assign to mankind various degrees of happiness or misery, according to their respective deserts.

This is the concluding reflection resulting from the parable.

The just shall then be rewarded with an entrance into the joy of their Lord; and their joy shall be in proportion to the talents committed to them, and to the improvement which they have made. For thus is the award of the Judge represented in this very parable, as recorded by St. Luke:—To him that had received ten pounds, and had made them ten pounds more, was committed authority over ten cities; and to him that had received five pounds, and had made them five pounds more, was committed authority over five cities. The rewards of the just will be proportionable to the talents bestowed, and to the improvement of them; to the grace which they had received, and to the service

which they had rendered. This is the dictate of reason, this is the rule of justice. In our Father's house are many mansions. One star differeth from another star in glory; so also shall it be at the resurrection of the just.

But as to the unprofitable servant—what is the doom pronounced upon him? “Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” The same rule of justice which assigns different degrees of happiness in heaven to the just, will also allot different degrees of misery in hell to the wicked, according to the measure of their guilt. But, alas! hell, in its lightest caverns, is still a place of torment; outer darkness covers it—the worm in it ceases not to gnaw—the fire in it is not quenched; no sounds issue from it but the sounds of despair—weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, for ever—for ever.

Brethren, what an awful sanction does the concluding representation of this parable afford to the moral which it contains! They who improve the talents committed to them, are admitted to the joy of their Lord; while the slothful and unprofitable are cast into outer darkness. Bring home, then, this awful scene to your own bosoms; bear it constantly in remembrance. You are stewards, to whom your Lord and Master hath intrusted his goods—the gifts of nature, of Providence, and of grace—in such proportion as his infinite wisdom judged best. To some of you he hath given five, to others two talents, and to others one. He is not “a hard Master, reaping where he has not sowed, and gathering where he has not strewed;” he will not require from you a service which he

hath not enabled you to perform, nor will he disproportion his rewards to your labours. If humble the talents of nature or of grace given you, sedulously improve them, and you shall not go without your reward. If more distinguished your natural endowments or spiritual gifts, greater will be your responsibility, more will be required of you; and greater also will be your reward. Your Lord will come and reckon with you. Hide not, then, your talent in the earth; sink not into sloth and negligence in your spiritual concerns; receive not the grace of God in vain; neglect not the business of your salvation. Remember, O remember the doom of the unprofitable servant—outer darkness, weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth, for ever—for ever. Diligently, then, improve the talents committed to you; devote every endowment of nature, every acquirement of industry, every blessing of Providence, every spiritual gift, to the glory of God, to the good of mankind, to the salvation of your own soul. Your labour in the Lord shall not be in vain. In the day when he comes to reckon with his servants, he will cover with the robe of his righteousness the infirmities which you have sought to overcome, the sins which you have humbly confessed: he will bring forth to the plaudits of men and angels, your humble piety, your exertions for his glory, your deeds of beneficence, your patience, your adversity, your zealous discharge of duty, neither seduced by the applauses of the world, nor shaken by its censures: to the plaudits of men and angels he will unite his own—“Well done, good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord.”

SERMON XXXVIII.

THE TEN LEPERS.

LUKE xvii. 17, 18.

Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not returned to give glory to God, save this stranger.

NEVER surely did a personage appear on the earth with such claims to the admiration, love, and gratitude of mankind, as the blessed Redeemer of the world. Uniting in his adorable person the glories of the Divinity with the perfection of human virtue; the Creator and Lord of the universe, and at the same time the bountiful Benefactor and compassionate Saviour of the human race; the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his person, and at the same time condescending to assume a human body, that in it he might bear our sins and carry our sorrows; there are no emotions of admiration, gratitude, and love, of which the human heart is susceptible, that should not have been rendered to him; and yet he was despised and rejected by those on whom he conferred the greatest blessings—was constantly assailed by that ingratitude, which at length, under its overwhelming load, crushed him, an innocent victim, on the cross.

Of this lamentable truth, the history of the ten lepers that were cleansed is one of the many proofs with which the suffering life of the Saviour abounds.

These persons were afflicted with a malady of the most loathsome and disgusting description. The leprosy was, in its own nature, a dreadful disease, and it was made more so by the institutions of the Jewish law. This law, designed, as a school-master, to bring men to Christ, typified, by its various institutions and ceremonies, that spiritual redemption which was finally to be wrought for men by the glorious Messiah, the desire of all nations and the hope of his people Israel. As the leprosy was a powerful, insidious, and loathsome disorder, that tainted the very sources of life, and corrupted the whole body, it was therefore considered by this law as typical of sin, that direful malady of the soul which corrupts all her powers and taints the principles of spiritual life. To denote, therefore, the great evil of sin, together with its fatal consequences, they who were afflicted with the leprosy—the impressive and highly appropriate type of the corrupting malady of the soul—were cut off from all intercourse with the rest of the Jews, were separated from a participation in their religious ordinances, and were shunned, as objects vile and disgusting. The numerous sacrifices that were to be made, and the purifications which the leper was to undergo, on his leprosy being healed, before he could be received again into civil and religious communion, were highly significant emblems of that one great sacrifice which Christ was to make for sin, and of the spiritual purification which the sinner must undergo before he could be restored to the favour of God.

With this direful disorder were those ten persons afflicted, who, in the bitterness of grief, and in all the earnest fervour of supplication, standing afar

off, lonely and shunned—being separated, on account of their leprosy, from all intercourse with others—“lifted up their voices and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” The cry of supplication was never addressed to Jesus in vain; the diseased and the miserable always found in him an almighty Friend, desirous and able to succour and to save. When, therefore, he saw the lepers, “he said unto them, Go show yourselves to the priests.” The priests, according to the Jewish law, were to judge when the leprosy was healed, and were to appoint the necessary sacrifices and purifications. The direction of our Saviour, therefore, that they should go and show themselves unto the priests, was to them, in fact, a pledge that they should be healed from their leprosy. “And it accordingly came to pass, that as they went, they were cleansed.” What should have been their emotions and their conduct on thus finding themselves unexpectedly relieved from this loathsome and dreadful malady? Should not the tribute of lively thanks have been immediately paid to their gracious and almighty Deliverer? Alas! there was only one of the ten, and he not a Jew, who valued himself on his religious character and privileges, but a Samaritan—belonging to a people among whom a temple was established distinct from the temple at Jerusalem—and who was therefore considered by the Jews as an outcast from their church and nation—only “one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God;” overwhelmed with the emotions of gratitude and affection, “he fell down on his face at the feet of his almighty Deliverer, giving him thanks.” Struck with the grateful affection of this

poor Samaritan, and indignant at the insensibility and ingratitude of the proud and self-conceited Jews, who went on their way without expressing any sentiment of gratitude for their deliverance, Jesus sorrowfully and expressively exclaimed—“Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger.”

This history, my brethren, forcibly suggests to us the guilt of the sin of ingratitude to God. While therefore we feel the sentiments of lively indignation rise in our bosoms at the view of the insensibility and ingratitude which the nine lepers who were cleansed displayed under the signal mercy which they received, it may be productive of salutary improvement, and it is certainly incumbent upon us diligently and seriously to inquire whether we are not justly chargeable with the same base sin of ingratitude to God—whether we do not merit the indignant reproaches which every feeling and ingenuous mind is disposed to cast on the lepers who were healed, on the insensible and ungrateful objects of the Saviour’s mercy.

Let us consider the many obligations, and review the many mercies and favours that call for gratitude to God, and see whether we are absolved from the guilt of violating this duty.

We have received from that Almighty Jehovah who created us after his own image, a rational and immortal nature, endued with powers vigorous and exalted, capable of ranging, with inextinguishable ardour, through the works of the Creator—of exploring, with keen and vigorous research, the hidden recesses of truth—and above all, of receiving the knowledge of the existence, and the attributes,

and the will of the Maker and Lord of all things—of knowing, of loving, and of enjoying, to all eternity, the infinitely exalted Fountain of truth, of goodness, of virtue, and of happiness. Have we given glory to God for this inestimable gift of a being spiritual in its nature, immortal in its existence, and capable of making continual advances to the perfection and happiness of Deity itself? Have our hearts overflowed with the emotions of gratitude to our glorious Maker, for ranking us thus high in the scale of being—for enduing us with capacities for the most exquisite, pure, and immortal enjoyments? or have we not, on the contrary, gone on our way, seldom reflecting on the exalted dignity of our nature, and still less frequently glorifying and magnifying the name of our Almighty Maker? Have we not ungratefully employed the exalted powers he has bestowed on us, in the career of sin and folly, in the pursuit of transitory and sensual gratifications, instead of devoting them to the glory of him who made us, to the service of him from whom we have derived them? Ah! my brethren, much I fear that these inquiries will convict us of having failed in these important duties; that they will fix on us the stain of ingratitude to the infinitely glorious Author of our being. To the good providence of him whose tender mercies are over all his works, we are indebted for the preservation of our being, for the countless enjoyments that crown our lot in life. He has placed us in a world enriched with beauties and glories that gratify every sense, and impart pleasure to every feeling of the heart. Not dooming us to solitary, and therefore to selfish joy, he has connected us in society by a thousand ties, and made

the exquisite emotions of pleasure in the breasts of others beat responsive to those in our own. In the many endearing relations of social and domestic life he has provided a rich increase of all our joys, a powerful alleviation of all our sorrows. Exercising towards us more than parental care, he “keeps us as the apple of his eye, he guards us as in the hollow of his hand;” and “though father and friend forsake us, yet will not he, whose goodness is boundless as his nature, and enduring as his existence. Have then these many blessings of his providence been returned with our homage, our love, our obedience? or, have we gone on our way, enjoying the bounties of his providence, heedless of the gracious Giver, neglectful of the tribute of affection and obedience due to him? Ah! it is to be feared that conscience will fix on some of us not only the stain of this criminal indifference and neglect, but the deeper guilt of having abused his bounties, to the corrupting of our own hearts, to the violation of his laws, and to the dishonour of his name.

Again: Infinitely powerful as are the claims of the Almighty, as our Creator and Preserver, to our gratitude and love, he appears in a relation to us still more endearing, still more loudly calling on us for the supreme and grateful homage of our hearts and lives. From everlasting misery, the just punishment of our numerous and aggravated violations of his laws, he offers us redemption: to the everlasting joys of his own glorious presence, which our most splendid and perfect virtue could not merit, he gives us a title. From death and misery he thus rescues us; to heaven and immortality he thus exalts us;—not by any human agency,

not by the instrumentality of the most exalted angel of his presence; but by the sacrifice of his only-begotten and well-beloved Son. This is a stupendous display of love, which absorbs in ceaseless adoration the host of heaven. Has it awakened in our hearts the sentiments of ardent gratitude? Have we, the unworthy subjects of this stupendous redemption, embraced it with thankfulness? Have we humbly devoted ourselves to the service of him who has redeemed us from hell and destruction, and conferred on us a title to an immortal and glorious existence? or, have we not, on the contrary, gone on our way, busied solely with the schemes of worldly aggrandizement, immersed in sensual pursuits, and regardless of the glorious redemption wrought for us by the sufferings and death of the Son of God? If this character should apply to us, indignant as we may be at being supposed capable of ingratitude, be assured, we have incurred its deepest guilt.

Pass from these *general* to the more particular mercies which we have received from the overflowing goodness of our God.

Can we not look back to some dismaying period, when sickness held us in its agonizing grasp, and death appeared to be laying his cold hand on the pulse of life? The Lord of sickness and of health, of life and death, in his abundant compassion allayed the malady that was torturing our frame, and arrested the approach of the king of terrors. And for this gracious deliverance have we praised our Almighty Benefactor in the courts of his house, paid our vows to him in the assembly of his people, and devoted to his service the life which he graciously spared? Alas! on the contrary, have not

the emotions of gratitude which at the first moment of our deliverance were enkindled in our bosoms, been extinguished by the first breath of worldly pleasure, and the vows of duty been forgotten in worldly business, care, and enjoyment? and have not these, instead of the service of him who rescued our souls from death, engrossed our thoughts, our hearts, and our lives?

Again: Can we not recall the period when some general or some sudden calamity threatened to overwhelm us; or when, plunged in the depths of adversity, almost every ray of worldly comfort seemed excluded? He who alone restrains the pestilence that walketh in darkness, as well as the arrow that flieth at noon day—he who rides in the whirlwind and directs the angry storm of adversity, redeemed our lives from destruction, and caused the bright morning of joy to succeed the sorrowful night of affliction. Ah! has the tribute of lively gratitude ascended to him? has the service of the life which he has redeemed and blessed shown forth his glory?

Can we not look back to the sorrowful period, when, bending over the almost lifeless body of some near and dear relative or friend, our agonized spirit poured forth the earnest and repeated prayer to the Father of mercies—‘Spare, oh! spare him, and my future life shall be devoted to thy glory!’ God in mercy heard our prayers, and restored to our embrace the object of our affections. And has that gracious Being witnessed also our gratitude, witnessed the performance of our vows? Alas! like the morning cloud, like the early dew, they have too often vanished away.

When the rod of chastisement has been stretched

over us, has not wrath been tempered with mercy? If we have had cause to mourn over the loss of an earthly blessing, the disruption of some tender tie of life, had we not also cause to magnify the name of our God, that he did not, in just judgment, strip us of every enjoyment—that he still opened to us the bosom of his mercy, where we might find consolation and everlasting rest? Have we thus fled from the sorrows and trials of life to God, our almighty refuge? In the midst of the dark cloud of adversity that overwhelmed us, animated by the divine favour, have we rejoiced in the Lord, and joyed in the God of our salvation? Alas! on the contrary, have we not too often indulged in the murmurs of discontent and repining, and sought to forget those afflictions by which God designed to rouse us to repentance in the circles of worldly enjoyment?

Cannot we recall many spiritual mercies that lay claim to our lively gratitude? When bowed down, like the bruised reed, under the weight of our sins—when, the storms of God's justice threatening us, we were ready to give ourselves up to despair; has not consolation from the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort flowed into our bosoms? Has not faith in the atonement of the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world, like the soothing balm of Gilead, allayed the sorrow of our hearts? Hath not the name of Jesus, like the precious ointment poured forth, shed consolation and joy through our troubled bosoms? Have our souls never been refreshed with those divine comforts which spring from the favour of God, from confidence in his protection and grace, from the glorious prospect of our heavenly inheritance—comforts which bear us in holy confidence above the world;

which defy its storms, its persecutions, and its sorrows? Have we not all cause to adore the merciful forbearance, the long-suffering goodness of our God, who, unprovoked by our sins, by our impenitence, by our ingratitude, still continues to us the offers of his mercy, the means of grace, the hope of glory? Ah! these are spiritual mercies, which, infinitely more than any temporal blessings, demand our homage, our gratitude, our most faithful and zealous service. And how have they been returned? Have we, like the grateful Samaritan leper, when cleansed from our spiritual maladies, and refreshed with the comforts of the divine favour, returned and given glory to God, or, like the nine insensible Jews, gone on our way, elated with spiritual self-confidence and pride, regardless of our solemn obligations to glorify our God by more vigorous and faithful obedience?

Brethren, it surely cannot be necessary for me to denounce the crime of ingratitude, to portray its guilt and its enormity; there is not a heart which will not instantly disclaim it as the offspring of that criminal indifference or disgraceful pride which extinguishes every generous, noble, and amiable feeling, and sinks the heart in sullen and gloomy insensibility. There is not an individual present who would not resent the charge of being insensible to favours conferred, of ungratefully requiting his benefactor: reflect then, I beseech you, how great will be your inconsistency, how awful your criminality, if you are guilty of ingratitude towards that Almighty Being whose favours sink in comparison the most splendid favours of the most powerful earthly benefactor—that Almighty Lord who has given you life, and being, and reason, and

enjoyment, spiritual mercy, glory and immortality; and guilty of ingratitude you will undoubtedly be, ingratitude, the enormity of which language would fail to portray, unless you devote to your heavenly Father the service of your hearts and your lives—unless you make his goodness the theme of your praises, his favour the object of your pursuit, and his laws the rule of your conduct. As you would wish, then, to escape the charge of an ingratitude that will be your disgrace, your everlasting punishment, repent, from the heart repent of all your past abuse of the mercies of your God, repent of all the ungrateful returns you have made to him for his infinite goodness. Forsake your sins, continuance in which displays the basest insensibility to his mercy and love. With renewed fidelity devote yourselves to him, through his eternal Son Jesus Christ, by whose merits and grace he importunes you to be reconciled unto him. Exercise that lively faith in the Son of God which will make you whole, not merely like the Samaritan leper, from a worldly leprosy, but from the spiritual leprosy of sin. Ever cherishing in your minds a lively sense of the manifold, the infinite mercies of your God and Saviour, be yours the holy resolution of the pious David: “I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live, I will praise my God while I have my being. My meditation of him shall be sweet; I will be glad in the Lord. Praise thou the Lord, O my soul, praise the Lord.”

These are the emotions with which those who partake of the Lord's supper should always approach the holy table; for there we are to show forth the Lord's death till he come; there we are called to a festival the most joyful that can awaken

our affections or engage our hearts; there, with angels and archangels, and all the company of heaven, we are to laud and magnify the glorious name of Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who, of his tender mercy, gave his only Son Jesus Christ to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption. Greater love than this was never displayed. Livelier emotions of gratitude should never be in exercise, than those with which we celebrate this stupendous act of grace and mercy, that meritorious sacrifice, whereby alone we obtain the remission of our sins, and are made partakers of the kingdom of heaven. And let those who never commemorate the love of him who yielded up his soul, by death upon the cross, for their redemption, seriously, most seriously consider with what plea they shall repel the charge of ingratitude, which must deserve, and will receive, sore punishment, in that day when the Saviour, whose mercy they now neglect, will be that Judge whose justice they cannot escape. Let them then repent of their past neglect and insensibility, and no longer violate a command the most solemn and affecting that ever was uttered—for it was uttered by the Son of God, who died for us—
“This do in remembrance of me.”

SERMON XXXIX.

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS.

LUKE xvi, 19, 20, 21.

There was a certain rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: and there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, who was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table; moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores.

Thus unequal is the distribution of the good things of the present life; thus apparently unjust are the dispensations of Providence. We behold here a rich man, surrounded by every luxury which can conduce to his splendour, his ease, or his enjoyment. His wealth procured for him all the richest productions of the earth, and his table daily exhibited every delicacy that could excite or gratify his appetite. "He was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day." How often is the extreme of wretchedness contrasted with the elevation of prosperity! At the gate of this voluptuous sensualist, whose ingenuity doubtless was exercised to dispose of his superfluous wealth, was laid Lazarus, a beggar, subsisting from day to day on the pittance which his entreaties extorted from the careless sons of prosperity, or which some sympathizing heart bestowed. The pains of loathsome disease aggravated the cravings

of hunger—he was “full of sores:” and thus was laid a pitiable and wretched outcast at the rich man’s gate. The cravings of hunger extorted the entreaty to be fed, if it were only with “the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table.” But in vain he stretched forth the hand of supplication and uttered the cry of entreaty; in vain did the look of anguish and the tear of misery make the silent but powerful appeal to the bosoms of those around him. Disgusted with his extreme wretchedness, it appears they left him, without succour and without consolation. Exposed and abandoned, “the dogs came and licked his sores.”

My brethren, when we behold this virtuous man (for such is the character which he sustains in the parable) sinking under the ills of poverty and sickness, while the voluptuous sensualist, at whose gate he was laid, rolled on the couch of ease and luxury; when we behold him perishing for want of the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table, whose pampered appetite was sated with the delicacies that, in luxurious profusion, were spread before him; we are tempted to exclaim, in the murmurs of impatient distrust—“What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have if we pray unto him? Verily we have cleansed our hearts in vain, and washed our hands in innocence.” These are the suggestions which sometimes arise in our minds, when we behold vice exalted in the world, and virtue suffering and degraded. But, my brethren, if we look beyond this dark and imperfect state of trial to the final development of the plans of Providence in that future world which will be our final and eternal abode, the murmurs of discontent and repining will be

silenced, and in the ardours of pious adoration we shall embrace the triumphant belief—"Verily there is a reward for the righteous; doubtless there is a God that judgeth the earth." For

"It came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried: and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom."

What a change is this! The poor beggar who was laid at the gate, whose famished bosom would have been refreshed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table—the wretched victim of poverty and disease, from whom men turned with disgust—whose wretchedness was so extreme, and whose situation so friendless, that even the dogs came and licked his sores—is now exalted to a state of happiness and glory: while the rich man, who in the world, which he made his portion, was "clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day," has exchanged the splendid and luxurious chamber for the dungeon of wo, and the voluptuous joys of sensual gratification for the worm that never dies, and the fire that never will be quenched.

We are not to understand by the "bosom of Abraham," in which Lazarus rested, the heaven of final happiness; for the Gospel uniformly represents that the glories of heaven are not awarded to the righteous "till the resurrection at the last day," when the body which, after the departure of the soul, was consigned to corruption, will rise in glory, and, united to the soul, be translated to the everlasting kingdom of God. The "bosom of Abraham," where Lazarus rested, is a figurative

expression for that invisible place where the souls of the pious repose in hope, in joy, and peace, till the glorious morn of the resurrection—and which is called Paradise, in the declaration of Christ to the penitent thief upon the cross—"This day thou shalt be with me" (not in heaven, for the Saviour did not ascend there till after his resurrection, but) "*in paradise.*"

In the like manner, by the hell in which the rich man lift up his eyes, is not meant the final hell of torments; this final hell of torments is expressed in the original by a different word from that which is denoted hell in the parable. To this everlasting abode of condemned spirits the Gospel represents none as consigned till the period of the general resurrection. The bodies of the wicked will then be united to their souls; and the awful sentence which consigns them to the final hell (*gehenna*) of torments, will be pronounced upon them. By the hell in the parable is meant the invisible place, the place of departed spirits, where the souls of the wicked remain in unutterable misery, tortured by the fearful anticipation of that just judgment which will finally consign them to the place prepared for the devil and his angels. In this place of the departed the rich man lifts up his eyes; he beholds afar off Lazarus, the beggar who once lay at his gate, in the bosom of Abraham, in a state of inconceivable blessedness and glory, while his soul was racked by torment. He burst forth in the cry for mercy—

"Father Abraham, have mercy on me."

He sought to have the fires that consumed him quenched:

"Send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his

finger in water and cool my tongue : for I am tormented in this flame."

"Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things : but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented."

Thou hast had thy reward in the world which thou didst choose as thy portion. That world was embittered to Lazarus. He chose a better portion, and is now enjoying the blessed fruits of his choice.

"And besides all this"—

Your destiny and his are unalterably determined—

"Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed : so that they who would pass from hence to you, cannot ; neither can they pass to us, who would come from thence."

The unhappy man, finding that his own state was hopeless, is filled with apprehension for his surviving brethren, who, as he once was, are immersed in sensual indulgence :

"I pray thee, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house : for I have five brethren ; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment."

Equally fruitless was this request.

"Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets"—

These are a sure guide in the path of duty, and fully and forcibly point out the fatal termination of that course of sensual indulgence which has proved your destruction—

"Let them hear them. Nay, father Abraham," (exclaims this miserable man, who, wretched himself, appears anxious to save his brethren, the

former companions of his guilty pleasures, from this place of torment :) “but if one went unto them from the dead they would repent.” A miracle so extraordinary would convert them; a messenger from the world of spirits, denouncing to them those miseries which he has himself witnessed, will surely rouse them.

“If they hear not Moses and the prophets,” was the reply, “neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.”

The revelation of Moses and the prophets is sufficiently clear and satisfactory; and the same perverse incredulity, the same guilty devotion to sensual enjoyments, which led them to reject the warnings of Moses and the prophets, will induce them to turn a deaf ear also to the remonstrances of one who rose from the dead.

Such is the conclusion of this important parable—for a parable, and not an authentic history, it evidently is. The manner of its introduction, the style and the imagery employed, and the absurdity and inconsistency which would attend a literal interpretation of it, all prove that it is not an authentic record of real, but of fictitious character and events. And as a parable, it is not to be strictly and literally interpreted; it being designed, in its *general* purport only, to inculcate important truths. To these truths let me now call your attention.

I. And in the first place, we learn that the real condition of men, as to their happiness or misery, is not to be determined by their outward circumstances in the world.

Look at the prosperous sinner; wealth, splendour, and gaiety surround him; the East furnishes

him with "purple and fine linen," which serve the purposes of splendour and luxurious indulgence; every luscious delicacy which can inflame or gratify his appetites is placed on his table; "the harp and the viol, the tabret and the pipe," banish care and melancholy, and awaken the joys of revelry and mirth. We are ready to pronounce, How supremely happy is this favoured son of fortune! He has no desire which he does not possess the means of gratifying; the world opens to him all her stores of indulgence. But we are deceived in the estimate of his real condition. Occupied solely with sensual pursuits, he possesses not that peace of mind which results only from living agreeably to the dictates of reason and conscience; and he is a stranger to that "peace of God" which results only from a faithful devotion to his service, and which only can confer true and substantial enjoyment. There is no peace to him in this world; and the day is coming, when the hand of God is to write against him the fearful sentence—"Thou art weighed in the balance, and found wanting." "In hell he lifts up his eyes, being in torments."

Look at the beggar at his gate; he is wasted with hunger—the crumbs which fall from the rich man's table would be a luxury to his soul; he is tortured with disease—there is no eye to pity, no hand to save him; naked, exposed, friendless, "the dogs come and lick his sores." Dark is the cloud that rests on this poor beggar; but the light of God's countenance shines on his soul. He is infinitely more honoured, infinitely more blessed than the proud voluptuary at whose gate he waits; for Lazarus is the friend of God; he is soon to be "carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom."

“Judge not then, brethren, according to appearance.” It is an error to call those happy, whom wealth decorates with worldly distinction, and surrounds with every sensual gratification—it is an error which is most dangerous, because it leads us to seek for happiness only in the riches, the honours, and the pleasures of the world. Those alone are to be accounted truly happy, who possess that peace of God which the world can neither give nor take away, and have laid up treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not corrupt. And those only are to be accounted really miserable, who have no title to the favour of him whose favour is life, and whose loving-kindness is better than life, and are exposed to the wrath of him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell: the pangs of conscience, the agitations of guilty passions, which here mar their peace, are increased by the fearful apprehensions of that future world, where are laid up for the ungodly, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish. The consciousness of his integrity, the firm assurance of God’s favour, comforted the afflicted Job. The wrath of the Almighty blasted the pleasures of a prosperous Belteshazzar. The favour of the Most High, refreshing, and consoling, and strengthening the soul, can render the condition of the beggar at the gate infinitely more to be desired than that of the voluptuary who revels in the palace.

2. We may remark how fatal is the termination of a life which, though not stained with gross criminality, is devoted merely to sensual indulgence.

What were the crimes which marked the character, and which occasioned the fearful destiny of the

rich man in the parable? It does not appear that any very glaring vices disgraced his character; no gross sin is laid to his charge. We have no reason to conclude that the rich man in the parable was an abandoned, profligate sinner. He is described as "clothed in purple and fine linen, and faring sumptuously every day." He was a voluptuary, devoted only to sensual gratifications. He made the world his idol. He placed his sole happiness in the splendour and ostentation of wealth, in the scenes of revelling, banqueting, and merriment. The care of his soul was forgotten, or neglected; the things that belonged to his eternal peace were put far off. Most probably he boasted of his freedom from the stain of gross vices; perhaps he prided himself on his open, free, and generous temper; and thus soothed himself with the hope that, as he had committed no gross vices, his reckoning would be easy at the bar of God. And, alas! men often sooth their consciences, and lull themselves into security by the same plea:—they do no harm in the world, they commit no gross sins; why should they fear to appear before God? Let them look at the fate of the rich man in the parable. Notwithstanding his freedom from glaring sins, the boasted innocence of his life, and the generous frankness with which he spread his board for the gratification of his companions, "in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments." How fatal was his delusion! and what a lesson does his fate read to those whose hearts are supremely bent on the world and its pleasures; who devote themselves to sensual gratifications, and while they preserve themselves free from glaring transgressions, think that they have nothing to fear! Look at this rich

voluptuary; your Saviour presents him as a warning to you. He deluded himself with the same hope with which you are flattering yourselves, that God would not punish him for those sensual gratifications which did no harm to others. And where did this hope lead him? "In hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments." "Walk then in the sight of your eyes, and in the imagination of your own hearts; but know, that for all these things God will bring you into judgment."

3. There is an important lesson which all who are blessed with wealth may derive from the parable before us.

Wealth, like every other advantage, natural or acquired, which we possess, is a talent intrusted to us by God, whose stewards we are to consider ourselves, and to whom we are to render an account. A liberal portion of the wealth with which he has blessed us, we must give back to him, by devoting it to the purposes of benevolence and piety: the residue we are not prohibited from devoting, in thankful moderation, to the purposes of personal and social gratification. But when, like the rich man in the parable, we devote this wealth to those voluptuous indulgences that corrupt the soul and estrange it from God, then it will prove a curse to its possessor. To such a rich man the declaration of our blessed Lord will apply—"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."

4. We notice, as strikingly set forth in this parable, the awful destiny of the wicked.

No sooner do they close their eyes upon this world, than, like the rich man in the parable, they are in "torments"—torments, of which the fearful agonies of remorse, that sometimes here tear the bosom of the sinner, afford but a faint idea; and compared to which, the fires that consume the victim at the stake could be easily borne. Their souls, when death rends them from the body, are consigned to inconceivable misery in the place of the departed; and at the day of judgment, their bodies united to their souls, they make their bed in hell—in devouring fire—in everlasting burnings; so says the word of God. To all eternity, to all eternity they cry, cry without ceasing—"Give me a drop of water to cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame." To all eternity they cry *in vain*. Alarming reflection! My brethren, if we live in neglect of God and of his service—if we, devoted only to the world, neglect the care of our souls—we shall finally dwell with the devouring fire—we must lie down with everlasting burnings; so, I repeat it, says the word of God; and would it be wise to make the experiment whether that word be true? And the event which is to consign us to this awful destiny—the event of death—is uncertain: it will come after the revolution of a few years—it may come to-morrow—it may come to-day.

5. We remark further, as exhibited in this parable, how glorious are the rewards of the righteous.

Like the pious Lazarus, as soon as their spirit departs from the body, attending angels receive it, and conduct it to the place of the departed, to that place which their Redeemer blessed with his pre-

sence in the interval between his death and his resurrection. They rest in the bosom of blessedness—in the society of the Father of the faithful—of all the saints who have departed in the faith of his holy name. There they are cheered by manifestations of the divine glory and perfections; and they anticipate, with holy rapture, their re-union with their glorified bodies, at the resurrection of the just. They look forward with holy and joyful confidence to the period when their corruption shall put on incorruption, and their mortal immortality—when the welcome sentence shall be addressed to them—“Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

Christian brethren, let us comfort one another with these words. Cheered by the glorious prospect which they present, let us follow our Christian friends from the bed of disease and death to the bosom of Abraham, to the custodies of that Almighty Saviour who holds the keys of death and hell; let us in holy imagination follow them—made like to the angels of God, invested with the garments of immortality—to the kingdom of their Almighty Father; and let us not sorrow, because they have gone before us to the place of rest and peace, as those that have no hope.

Lastly. We remark, as enforced by this parable, on the guilt of those who reject or disregard the offers of salvation proclaimed in the Gospel.

How great would be the obstinacy, the incredulity, and the guilt of those who would reject a messenger coming unto them from the dead, and announcing the awful realities of the invisible

world! Such was the obstinacy, the incredulity, and the guilt of the Jews, who rejected the testimony of that divine Personage who arose from the dead to assure them of the certainty of a future state—that God would judge the world in righteousness. Such is now the obstinacy, the incredulity, and the guilt of those who contemn or neglect the offers of salvation from him who has brought life and immortality to light. Would they be persuaded if one were to rise from the dead? The testimony of all ages to those divine miracles which Christ wrought—the numerous prophecies which were fulfilled in his person, and in the condition of those who were once God’s chosen people—the excellence of his holy religion, the sublime nature of its doctrines, the sanctity of its precepts, the efficacy of its aids, the value of its consolations, the splendour of its rewards, and the awful severity of its punishments—the warnings of God’s providence—the secret monitions and strivings of his Spirit—the denunciations of his justice, the invitations of his mercy—the terrors of hell, the hopes of heaven—if all these do not convince or move them, “neither would they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.” Alas! how shall they escape, who neglect so great salvation?—who, immersed in worldly pursuits and sinful pleasures, neglect that one thing needful, the care of their immortal souls. Let them consider the fate of the rich man in the parable. They are now gay and thoughtless; so he once was. They are forgetful of God and eternity; such was once the forgetfulness of the rich man. “In hell he lifts up his eyes, being in torments.” If the world could purchase that day of grace which he contemned, do we not

think that the world, if he possessed it, would be joyfully given? My brethren, that day of grace we now enjoy; let us not neglect it, lest, like this hapless sinner, we lift up our eyes, being in torments—lest, like him, we cry for mercy, but it is too late.

Christian brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord: for your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord. Through the cares and trials of life, that God to whom you have devoted yourselves, and whom you endeavour faithfully to serve, will support you. Be not dismayed at the dark valley of the shadow of death; your Saviour shall conduct you through it. Death he will strip for you of its sting, and the grave of its victory. From this vale of tears you shall be translated, like the pious Lazarus, to the paradise of God. When your earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, you shall be clothed upon with a house which is from heaven—when you have passed the region of the grave, you shall come to the city of the living God, where flow the waters of life, of comfort, of salvation.

SERMON XL.

THE SOURCES OF HUMAN TROUBLE, AND ITS ANTIDOTE.

JOHN xiv. 1.

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.

THIS was the language which our blessed Lord addressed to his disciples but a short time before his crucifixion. It was natural that their hearts should be troubled, when they looked forward to their beloved Friend and Master suffering an ignominious death; when they considered that they thus would soon be deprived of his affectionate counsel and support; and when they surveyed the trials and persecutions which awaited them, as the disciples of one whom the inveterate malice of his enemies would crucify and slay. Jesus, their divine Master, was touched with compassion for them, and he addressed to them the voice of consolation—"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me." Ye believe in God, who is infinitely wise, infinitely powerful, and infinitely good; believe also in me, whom he hath sent to be your Guide, Comforter, and Saviour—through whom you can have access unto this greatest and best of Beings, and obtain a title to his blessing, his protection, and his everlasting favour. What can hurt you or make you afraid? Believ-

ing in God, believing in me, let not your heart be troubled.

This, brethren, is the language which Jesus Christ still addresses to us, his disciples; and the consolatory truth which he exhibits, and which it is my design now to inculcate, is, that *faith in God, through Jesus Christ, is an effectual remedy for all the troubles of the heart.*

From the troubles of the heart who is exempt? Who therefore will not feel interested in the gracious declaration—"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me."

The troubles of the heart arise—

1. From the sense of guilt;
2. From the power of sin and temptation;
3. From the calamities of the world;
4. From the fear of death.

For all these, *faith in God, through Jesus Christ,* is an all-powerful remedy. It offers,

1. For the sense of guilt, the assurance of pardon;
2. For the power of sin and temptation, the certainty of victory by the aids of divine grace;
3. For the calamities of the world, the consolations of the divine favour;
4. For the fear of death, the triumphant hope of immortality.

1. Faith in God, through Christ, is a remedy for the sense of guilt, by the assurance of pardon which it conveys to us.

Where is the individual, brethren, who has not, in a greater or less degree, disregarded the dictates of reason, resisted the monitions of con-

science, and violated the righteous commands of God, his Maker, his Sovereign, and his Judge? There is no man who liveth and sinneth not; and there is no man who views the evil of sin in the colours in which reason and the word of God present it, and who faithfully examines his own life, marked by actual transgressions as well as omissions of duty, who will not feel cause to exclaim with the penitent psalmist—"There is no health in my flesh, because of thy displeasure, O Lord; neither is there any rest in my bones, by reason of my sin: for my wickednesses are gone over my head, and are like a sore burden, too heavy for me to bear."

For this sore trouble of the heart who can find a remedy? Can reason or nature proclaim the terms on which the just Governor of the universe will remit the punishment incurred by man who has offended him, and convey that assurance of pardon which only can dispense peace to the wounded spirit? Man, oppressed and agitated with a sense of guilt, turns for consolation to reason and nature. He hears not the voice of pardon; for this can come only from the God of reason and nature, the Almighty Sovereign, against whom man has transgressed, and who only, therefore, can declare the terms on which the penalties of transgression shall be remitted. The God of reason and nature, the Almighty Sovereign whom man has offended, is as merciful and good as he is just and holy: he has sent his Son Jesus Christ to satisfy the justice and repair the violated authority of his government, and thus to be vested with power to proclaim the terms of forgiveness. The Son of God was constituted, in our nature, the Lamb with-

out blemish and without spot, slain for the sins of the world; and he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; he was made sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him; he was delivered for our offences, and raised for our justification. That mystery is resolved which baffled the efforts of reason, "how God could be just, and yet justify the sinner:" for "if any man sin, he has an Advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is a propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."

Thus does faith in God's mercy, through Jesus Christ, convey the assurance of pardon.

Let not then your hearts be troubled; God is in Jesus Christ reconciling the world unto himself. Conscience may accuse you of numerous violations of the laws of God; in the indulgence of your sinful passions you may have resisted his authority, contemned his power and his justice, despised his gracious warnings, and rejected his merciful invitations; the remembrance of your sins may be grievous unto you, and the burden of them intolerable; yet let not your heart be troubled; God has proclaimed, through his Son Jesus Christ, the terms of forgiveness—has provided for the remission of your guilt. Repent, and be heartily sorry for these your misdoings. Resolve to serve God in newness of life; and have a lively faith in his mercy, through Christ, the all-sufficient and compassionate Saviour who has graciously promised to receive all those who come unto God through him. Believe steadfastly, unhesitatingly believe that God, for his sake, will be merciful unto your unrighteousness, and

will remember your sins and iniquities no more. "Be of good comfort"—it is your Saviour who speaks to you—"Be of good comfort, your sins are forgiven." "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me."

2. But even when the heart is refreshed by the assurance of the pardon of its past sins, its troubles are renewed in the sense of its liability to temptation.

For this source of trouble, *faith in God, through Jesus Christ*, presents the hope of victory by the aids of divine grace.

Though an all-sufficient atonement for sin is provided, and though pardon is thus offered to all who truly repent and believe, who come unto God through Christ, steadfastly purposing to serve and please him in newness of life; yet how is this possible? "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, and the leopard his spots? Then may they do good who have been accustomed to do evil." Alas! so weak and corrupt is man's nature, that when he would do good, evil is present with him. He may delight in the law of God, after the inward man, agreeably to the dictates of reason and of conscience; but he finds another law in his members warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin. This is the natural condition of man. It is worse than folly to attempt to reconcile this constitution of our nature with the justice and benevolence of our Almighty Maker. So it is. Unjust and cruel indeed would this condition of man be, were there no remedy provided. 'For to what purpose,' he may exclaim, 'is pardon offered on conditions

which I am unable to perform? Forgiveness is promised only to those who forsake their sins. I have not the strength and resolution to forsake them: sinful propensities and passions hold the dominion over me, and overpower the dictates of my reason, and prostrate my virtuous resolutions. In vain do I desire and endeavour to do the commandments of God: the temptations of the world, so alluring and powerful, find advocates in my passions, and lead me to violate my vows of obedience, and to depart from God's holy ways; I do the things which I ought not to do, and leave undone the things which I ought to do; I indulge in practices which my sober reason disapproves, and neglect to discharge those high duties which I know are the law and the perfection of my nature. Thus continuing a transgressor, thus fast bound by the chain of my sins, how can I expect that I can be acceptable to a God who, though he declares mercy to the penitent who forsakes his sins, is yet of purer eyes than to behold iniquity? How can I indulge the hope of pardon, when I do not exercise those holy affections, nor discharge those duties, which are the indispensable qualifications for enjoying the favour of a righteous, and just, and holy God? Wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

This is the condition in which nature finds man, subject, from the objects which surround him, and from the sinful passions of his heart, to temptations which lead him to violate the dictates of reason, and conscience, and the divine law—to resist and to overcome them, he finds his own powers impotent, his own exertions ineffectual. In this deplorable condition nature finds man, and in this condi-

tion she leaves him. She holds forth no effectual aid by which man may escape from the power of temptation; she knows no deliverer who can rescue man from this spiritual thralldom, and assure him victory over his foes.

But there is a voice, to which reason and nature are strangers, which addresses to those who, sensible of the weakness and corruption of their nature, are overwhelmed with despondency at their vain efforts for deliverance—"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me:"—it is the voice of Jesus Christ, whom God hath exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins; and imperfectly would he perform his divine office, if he did not, by saving us from the dominion of our sins, qualify us to receive the remission of them.

Here, then, is the effectual remedy which faith in God, through Christ, applies for the troubles of the heart which laments its subjection to sin and to temptation. That incomprehensible but powerful grace of the Holy Spirit, whereby man is prepared for calling upon God, is redeemed from sin, sanctified in soul and body, and led in the ways of God's laws, and in the works of his commandments, is the gift of God, through Christ. Secretly but powerfully does God's preventing grace, going before men in all holy works, excite them to repentance, and to faith, and to holy obedience; and they who, not resisting his gracious influences, lament and confess their sins, imploring God's mercy and grace through Jesus Christ, and waiting upon him in the ordinances of his church, to which this Spirit is especially and fully given, shall be renewed in the spirit of their minds, shall be en-

dued with divine power to resist and overcome the most formidable temptations, and to serve their God in newness of life.

Yes, the penitent believer is assured that he can do all things necessary for his salvation through that grace of Christ which strengtheneth him. By this grace he obtains that new heart, and renders that holy obedience, which, though they may be alloyed with imperfections, will yet be acceptable unto God, through the righteousness of his Son Jesus Christ. The heart of the believer, then, need not be troubled. He knows in whom he has believed: he knows that God is faithful; and that God hath promised not to tempt him above what he is able to bear, but will with the temptation make a way to escape; and that he will never leave nor forsake those who trust in him. He knows that his Saviour is almighty; and his Saviour hath promised, "My grace shall be sufficient for you; my strength shall be made perfect in your weakness." Furnished with supernatural strength, armed with the grace of his God and Saviour, he subdues his sinful passions, he perseveres in the paths of holiness—he overcomes the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil—he bears down his enemies under his feet.

Thus, then, is faith in God, through Christ, all-powerful in removing the sense of guilt, and in resisting the assaults of temptation.

3. It is equally efficacious against the *sorrows* of the world.

Guilt may be pardoned and sin may be subdued, and yet the heart may be troubled. The Christian, whose soul is softened by divine mercy and sub-

dued by divine grace, becomes more tender and susceptible, more alive to the sorrows of the world. He feels most acutely the stroke of adversity which inflicts pain, sickness, or poverty, or consigns to the tomb those whom nature or friendship hath endeared to him. For these troubles of the heart, reason supplies no effectual remedy. She enforces submission to evils, because we cannot avoid them—acquiescence in calamities, because they will not last for ever. These are cold consolations. But faith in God's mercy, through Christ, supplies consolations which are active and lively. Faith teaches us, that the evils which we cannot indeed avoid, are, in the hands of our gracious and merciful Father, the instruments of our spiritual good. Faith not only teaches us that the evils with which we are assailed will soon terminate, but renders us resigned to their continuance, by the assurance that they are the evidences of God's love for us, the merciful discipline by which he subdues our vices, exalts our virtues, weans us from the world, and prepares us for more exalted glory in heaven. Faith teaches us that, by these afflictions, we are conformed (and what a privilege is this!) to the likeness of our divine Master, who was despised and afflicted; and that while his grace is ready to support us under them, they are the pledges of our finally sharing with him the glory with which, after his patient endurance of suffering, he is invested at the right hand of the Father. These are remedies for affliction which reason and nature cannot supply; which enable Christians, under calamities which would overwhelm with disconsolate grief those whose only comforter is nature, to exhibit the serenity, the tenderness, the meekness of

holy resignation, and to exclaim, in the fervour of triumphant faith—"As dying, and behold we live; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." They are remedies supplied only by that Saviour who, infinite in mercy and power, addresses to his followers the divine words of consolation—"Let not your hearts be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me."

4. In this divine declaration, also, we behold our only remedy for that trouble of the heart more severe than all others—*the fear of death*.

The fear of leaving the world, so long the scene of our plans, exertions, and pleasures—the fear of encountering the agonies which convulse the body when the ties which bind it to the soul are rent asunder—the fear that the vigour of intellect, the fire of imagination, the glow of friendship, the fervour of affection, will be extinguished in the gloom of the grave—these are the fears which clothe death with such terrors—they are fears which nature inspires, which reason cannot allay; she possesses no light with which to explore that dark futurity—no consolations with which to cheer the spirit, trembling on the confines of an unknown world.

But to this trembling spirit a voice is addressed—"Be not troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me." It is the voice of him who hath brought life and immortality to light, and who holds the keys of death and the grave; who died and was buried, and rose again, and now liveth for ever; who ascended up on high, leading captivity captive; and, seated in glory at the right hand of

God, hath promised to his followers, that where he is, there they shall be also. Believing in him, the heart of the Christian is no longer troubled : his Guide through the valley of the shadow of death is that heavenly Shepherd whose rod and whose staff support him : his Comforter in his last hour is that Saviour who himself tasted the bitterness of death. Supported and invigorated by faith in this Almighty Redeemer, the Christian passes through the grave and gate of death to a joyful resurrection. The hour so terrible to nature, so tremendous to the sinner, is the hour of the Christian's triumph ; for it is the hour when his trials terminate, when his warfare is closed, when he enters on a state of unspeakable and immortal glory. "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

Brethren, how exalted is that faith which thus proves a sovereign remedy for the troubles of the heart—the sense of guilt, the power of temptation, the sorrows of the world, the fear of death.

What a foe, then, to human happiness is that infidelity which would deprive man of this exalted faith—which would leave him with no other comforters under the troubles of the heart than nature and reason—nature and reason, which reveal no pardon for guilt, no power to overcome temptation, no effectual consolation under the sorrows of life, no refuge from the fears of death.

But what is this faith, thus exalted in its effects? Is it a cold and unproductive belief in God's mercy through a Saviour? No; it is a faith which works by love, which purifies the heart, which leads to holy obedience. It is a faith which, under a sense of guilt, trusts for pardon only to the mercy of God

through the Saviour's merits; which, under the assaults of temptation, applies to the grace of God for strength to resist it; which, under the sorrows of the world, seeks for the only effectual consolation in the favour of God; and which, under the fear of death, sees no other deliverer but Jesus Christ, who is the resurrection and the life. It is a faith so strong, so lively, so uniform in its operation, that the Christian lives by it, makes it the principle of his obedience, the source of his consolations, and the ground of his triumphs. This is the faith meant by our Saviour in his exhortation to his disciples—"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me."

Let those who are conscious that they do not possess this faith, be diligent in acquiring it. Let them, under a sense of their guilt and unworthiness, in lively penitence implore pardon through the merits of that blood which taketh away the sins of the world. Resolving to forsake their sins, let them fervently invoke the grace of God in Christ to create a clean heart and renew a right spirit within them, and to enable them to resist temptation, and to establish them in the ways of holiness. They will find the sense of guilt removed, and the dominion of sin subdued: their hearts will not be troubled: their God and Saviour will be with them in all their sorrows to comfort them, and in the hour of death to give them victory.

But, destitute of this faith, guilt will disturb their conscience, sin will corrupt their souls, the sorrows of the world will depress them, death will pursue them with his terrors. How happy would it be for them, if, beyond death, there were no terrors!

But the terrors of death are the prelude to that everlasting wo which is denounced (and who would make the experiment whether the denunciation will be executed?) as the portion of transgressors, of those who despise the riches of God's mercy in Jesus Christ.

Oh, then, my Christian brethren, cultivate, by reading the word of God, by meditation, by prayer, by attention on all holy ordinances, your faith in God's mercy through Christ. In proportion to the strength of this faith will be the peace of your conscience, the power of holiness in your souls, your superiority to the changes and sorrows of the world, your composure and hope in death, and your felicity through endless ages. Believe in God, through Jesus Christ, and let not your heart be troubled.

THE END.



1 1012 01105 0

1 1012 01195 3629

[illegible]

PRINTED IN U. S. A.

